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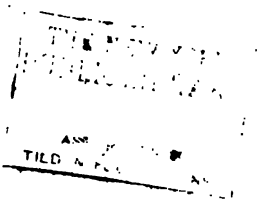
THE WISHING MOON



"'Shut your eyes'"

THE WISHING MOON

BY

LOUISE DUTTON

AUTHOR OF
"THE GODDESS GIRL"

ILLUSTRATED BY
EVERETT SHINN

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THE WISHING MOON

The Wishing Moon

CHAPTER ONE

A LITTLE girl sat on the worn front door-steps of the Randall house. She sat very still and straight, with her short, white skirts fluffed daintily out on both sides, her hands tightly clasped over her thin knees, and her long, silk-stockinged legs cuddled tight together. She was bare-headed, and her short, soft hair showed silvery blonde in the fading light. Her hair was bobbed. For one miserable month it had been the only bobbed head in Green River. Her big, gray-green eyes had a fugitive, dancing light in them. The little girl had beautiful eyes.

The little girl was Miss Judith Devereux Randall. She was eleven years old, and she felt happier to-night than she remembered feeling in all the eleven years of her life.

The Randalls' lawn was hedged with a fringe of lilac and syringa bushes, with one great, spreading horse-chestnut tree at the corner. The house did not stand far back from the street. The little

girl could see a generous section of Main Stree sloping past, dark already under shadowing trees The street was empty. It was half-past six, an supper-time in Green River, but the Randalls di not have supper, they dined at night, like th Everards. To-night mother and father wer dining with the Everards, and the little girl ha plans of her own.

Father was dressed, and waiting, shut in th library. Mother was dressing in her big corne room upstairs, with all the electric lights lighted The little girl could see them, if she turned he head, but mother was very far away, in spite o that, for her door was locked, and you could no go in. You could not watch her brush her long wonderful hair, or help her into her evening gown Mother's evening gown was black this summer with shiny spangles—a fairy gown. Mother ha to be alone while she dressed, because she was go ing to the Everards'.

There were two Everards, the Colonel, who wa old because his hair was white, and his wife, wh wore even more beautiful clothes than mother She had heard her father say that the Colonel ha made the town, and she had heard Norah, th cook, say that he owned the town. She had a idea that these two things were not quite the same though they sounded alike, for father was fond o

the Colonel, and Norah was not. At any rate, he was president of the bank—father and Norah agreed about that—and he lived in a house at the edge of the town, in what used to be a part of Larribees' woods. Father used to go Mayflowering there, but now nobody could.

The house was ugly, with things sticking out all over it, towers and balconies and cupolas, and it was the little girl's twin. She was born the year the Everards settled in Green River.

"And you're marked with it," Norah said, in one of their serious talks, when Mollie, the second girl, was out, and the two had the kitchen to themselves. Norah was peeling apples for a pie, and allowing her unlimited ginger-snaps, straight from the jar. "Marked with it, Miss Judy."

"What?"

"That house, and what goes on in it."

"What does go on?"

"You'll know soon enough."

"I'm not marked with it. I've got a birthmark, but it's a strawberry, on my left side, like the princesses have in the fairy tales."

"You are a kind of a princess, Miss Judy."

"Is that a bad thing to be, Nana?"

"It's a lonesome thing."

"My strawberry's fading. Mother says it will go away."

"It won't go away. What we're born to be, we will be, Miss Judy——. Bless your heart, you're crying, with the big eyes of you. What for, dear?"

"I don't know. I don't want to be a princess. I don't want to be lonesome. I hate the Everards."

"Well, there's many to say that now, and there'll be more to say it soon." Norah muttered this darkly, into her yellow bowl of apples, but Judith heard: "Here, eat this apple, child. You musn't hate anybody."

"I do. I hate the Everards."

Queer things came into your head to say when you were talking with Norah, who had an aunt with the second sight, and told beautiful fairy tales herself, and even believed in fairies; Judith did not. The Everards gave Judith and no other little girl in town presents at Christmas, and invited Judith and no other little girl to lunch. They had a great deal to do with her trouble, her serious trouble, which she would not discuss even with Norah. But she did not really hate the Everards—certainly not to-night. She was too happy.

Judith was going out to hang May-baskets.

So was every other little girl in town who wanted to, and it was a wonderful thing to be doing to-night. It was really May night, by the weather as well as the calendar—the kind of night that

Norah's fairies meant should come on the first of May: warm, with a tiny chill creeping into the air as the dark came, a pleasant, shivery chill, as if there might really be fairies or ghosts about. It was still and clear. One star, that had just come up above the horse-chestnut tree, looked very small and bright and close, as if it had climbed up into the sky out of the dark, clustering leaves of the tree.

This was the star that Judith usually wished on, but she could wish on the moon to-night; Norah had told her so; wish once instead of three nights running, and get her wish whether she thought of the red fox's tail or not. The new moon of May was a wishing moon.

A wishing moon! The small white figure on the steps cuddled itself into a smaller heap. Judith sighed happily and closed her eyes. She was going with the others. She had her wish already.

It was Judith's great trouble that she was not like other little girls. Until she was six Judith had a vague idea that she was the only child in the world. Then she tried to make friends with two small, dirty girls over the back fence, and found out that there were other children, but she must not play with them. One day Norah found her crying in the nursery because she could not think what to play, and soon after Willard Nash,

the fat little boy next door, came to dinner and into her life, and after that, Eddie and Natalie Ward, from the white house up the street, and Lorena Drew, from over the river. Still other children came to her parties, so many that she could not remember their names. Then Judith's trouble began. She was not like them.

She did not look like them; her clothes were not made by a seamstress, but came from city shops, and had shorter skirts, and stuck out in different places. She could not do what they did; Mollie called for her at nine at evening parties, and she usually had to go to bed half an hour after dinner, before it was dark. She had to do things that they did not do: make grown-up calls with her mother and wear gloves, and take lessons in fancy dancing instead of going to dancing school.

But she had gone to school now for almost a year, a private school in the big billiard-room at the Larribees', but a real school, with other children in it. They did not make fun of her clothes, or the way she pronounced her words, very often now. She belonged to a secret society with Rena and Natalie. She had spent one night with Natalie, though she had to come home before breakfast. The other children did not know she was different, but Judith knew.

Unexpected things might be required of her at

a moment's notice: to be excused from school and pass cakes at a tea at the Everards'; to leave a picnic before the potatoes were roasted, because Mollie had appeared, inexorable; unaccountable things, but she was to be safe to-night. May night was not such a wonderful night for any little girl as it was for Judith.

The lights were on in Nashs' parlour, and not turned off in the dining-room, which meant that the rest of the family were not through supper, but Willard was. Presently she heard three loud, unmelodious whistles, his private signal, and a stocky figure pushed itself through a gap in the hedge which looked, and was, too small for it, and Judith rubbed her eyes and sat up—it crossed the lawn to her.

"Good morning, Merry Sunshine," said Willard, ironically.

"I wasn't asleep."

"You were."

"I heard you coming."

"You did not."

"I did so."

These formalities over, she made room for him eagerly on the steps. Willard looked fatter to Judith after a meal, probably because she knew how much he ate. His clean collar looked much too clean and white in the dark, and he was evi-

dently in a teasing mood, but such as he was, he was her best friend, and she needed him.

"Willard, guess what I'm going to do?"

"I don't know, kid." Willard's tone implied unmistakably that he did not want to know.

"To-night!"

Judith's voice thrilled. Willard stared at her. Her eyes looked wider than usual, and very bright. She was smiling a strange little smile, and a rare dimple, which he really believed she had made with a slate pencil, showed in her cheek. The light in her face was something new to him, something he did not understand, and therefore being of masculine mind, wished to remove.

"You're going to miss it to-night for one thing, kid," he stated deliberately.

"Oh, am I?" Judith dimpled and glowed.

"We're going to stay out until ten. Vivie's not going." Willard's big sister had chaperoned the expedition the year before. Now it was to go out unrestrained into the night.

"That's lovely."

Willard searched his brain for more overwhelming details.

"We've got a dark lantern."

"That's nice."

"I got it. It's father's. He won't miss it. It's hidden in the Drews' barn. We're going to

meet at the Drews, to fool them. They'll be watching the Wards'."

"They will?"

"Sure."

"The—paddies?"

"Sure."

Judith drew an awed, ecstatic breath. He was touching now on the chief peril and charm of the expedition. Hanging May-baskets, conferring an elaborately-made gift upon a formal acquaintance, was not the object of it—nothing so philanthropic; it was the escape after you had hung them. You went out for adventure, to ring the bell and get away, to brave the dangers of the night in small, intimate companies. And the chief danger, which you fled from through the dark, was the paddies.

She did not know much about them. She would not show her ignorance by asking questions. But there were little boys with whom a state of war existed. They chased you, even fought with you, made a systematic attempt to steal your May-baskets. They were mixed up in her mind with gnomes and pirates. She was deliciously afraid of them. She hardly thought they had human faces. She understood that they were most of them Irish, and that it was somehow a disgrace for them to be Irish, though her own Norah was Irish and proud of it.

"Sure!" said Willard. "Irish boys. Paddies from Paddy Lane. Ed got a black eye last year. We'll get back at them. It will be some evening." Judith did not look jealous or wistful yet. "The whole crowd's going."

"Yes, I know," thrilled Judith. "Oh, Willard——"

"Oh, Willard," he mimicked. Judith pronounced all the letters in his name, which was not the popular method. "Oh, Willard, what do you think I heard Viv say to the Gaynor girl about you?"

"Don't know. Willard, won't the paddies see the dark lantern?"

"Viv said you were as pretty as a doll, but just as stiff and stuck-up," pronounced Willard sternly. "And your father's only the cashier of the bank, and just because the Everards have taken your mother up is no reason for her to put on airs and get a second girl and get into debt——"

He broke off, discouraged. Judith did not appear to hear him. After the masculine habit, as he could not control the situation, he rose to leave.

"Well, so long, kid. I've got to go to the post-office."

Even the mention of this desirable rendezvous, which was denied to her because Mollie always

brought home the evening mail in a black silk bag, did not dim the dancing light in Judith's eyes. She put a hand on his sleeve.

"Willard——"

"Well, kid?"

"Willard, don't you wish I was going to-night?"

"What for, to fight the paddies, or carry the dark lantern?"

"I could fight," said Judith, with a little quiver in her voice, as if she could.

"Fight? You couldn't even run away. They'd" —Willard hissed it mysteriously—"they'd get you."

"No, they wouldn't, because"—something had happened to her eyes, so that they did not look tantalizing—"you'd take care of me, Willard," she announced surprisingly, "wouldn't you?"

"Forget it," murmured Willard, flattered.

"Wouldn't you?"

"I——"

"Willard!"

"Yes."

"Well—I am. Father made mother let me. I'm going with you."

The words she had been trying to say were out at last in a hushed voice, because her heart was beating hard, but they sounded beautiful to her, like a kind of song. Perhaps Willard heard it,

too. He really was her best friend, and he did not look so fat, after all, in the twilight. She waited breathlessly.

"You are?"

Judith nodded. She could not speak.

"Well!" Willard's feelings were mixed, his face was not fashioned to express a conflict of emotions, and words failed him, too. "You're a queer kid. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Aren't you glad, Willard?"

"You'll get sleepy."

"Aren't you glad?"

"Sure I'm glad. But you can't run, and you are a cry-baby."

These were known facts, not insults, but now Judith's eyes had stopped dancing.

"Judy, are you mad with me?"

"No."

"You're the queerest kid." Up the street, he caught sight of a member of a simpler sex than Judith's. "There's Ed coming out of the gate. I've got to see him about something. See you later. Don't be mad. So long!"

The house was astir behind Judith. Father was opening and shutting doors, and hunting for things. Norah was helping mother into her wraps and scolding. Somebody was telephoning. Mother's carriage was late.

But it was turning into the yard now, a big, black hack from the Inn, with a white horse. Judith liked white horses best. The front door opened, and her father, very tall and blond, with his shirt-front showing white, and her mother, with something shiny in her black hair, swept out.

"Look who's here," said her father, and picked her up with his hands under her elbows. "Going to paint the town red to-night, son?"

"Red?" breathed Judith. How strong father was, and how beautiful mother was. She smelled of the perfume in the smallest bottle on the toilet-table. How kind they both were. "Red?"

"Harry, you see she doesn't care a thing about going. She'd be better off in bed. Careful, baby! Your hair is catching on my sequins. Put her down, Harry. You'll spoil the shape of her shoulders some day."

"Don't you want to go, son?"

"I—" Judith choked, "I——"

"Well, she's not crazy about it, is she?"

"Then do send her to bed."

"No, you can't break your promise to a child, Minna."

"Prig," said mother sweetly, as if a prig were a pleasant thing to be. "All right, let her go, then. Oh, Harry, look at that horse. They've sent us the knock-kneed old white corpse again."

Mother hurried him into the carriage, and it clattered out of the yard. They did not look back. They were always in a hurry, and rather cross when they went to the Everards. For once she was glad to see them go, such a dreadful crisis had come and passed. How could father think she did not want to go, father who used to hang May-baskets himself? Norah was calling her, but she did not answer. Norah was cross to-night. She did not know how happy Judith was.

Nobody knew, but now Judith did not want to tell. She did not want sympathy. She was not lonely. This secret was too important to tell. And, before her eyes, a lovely and comforting thing was happening, silently and suddenly, as lovely things do happen. Quite still on the steps, a white little figure, alone in a preoccupied world, but calm in spite of it, Judith looked and looked.

Above the horse-chestnut tree, so filmy and faint that the star looked brighter than ever, so pale that it was not akin to the stars or the flickering lights in the street, but to the dark beyond, where adventures were, so friendly and sweet that it could make the wish in your heart come true, whether you were clever enough to wish it out loud or not, hung the wishing moon.

CHAPTER TWO

A SMALL, silent procession was edging its way along Church Street, darkly silhouetted against a faintly starred sky. It was a long hour later now, and looked later still on Church Street. There were few lights left in the string of houses near the white church, at the lower end of the street, and here, at the upper end, there were no lights but the one street lamp near the railroad bridge that arched black overhead, and there were few houses. The street did not look like a street at all, but a country road, and a muddy one.

The narrow board sidewalk creaked, so the procession avoided it, and stuck to the muddy side of the road.

The procession looked mysterious enough, even if you were walking at the tail of it and carrying a heavy market basket; if you had to smell the lantern, swung just in front of you, but did not have the fun of carrying it; if a shaker cloak, hooded and picturesque, in the procession, hampered your activities; if you had questions to ask, and nobody answered you.

"Willard."

"Sh!"

One by one, they came into sight, in the wavering light of the street lamp, and melted into the dark under the bridge; Ed, in his white sweater, captaining them, and keenly aware of it; Rena and Natalie, with the larger market basket between them; Willard, bulky in two sweaters, and tenderly shielding his lantern with a third, and Judith. Her face showed pale with excitement against the scarlet of her hood. One hand plucked vainly at Willard's sleeve; he stalked on, and would not turn. Only these five, but they had consulted and organized and reorganized for half an hour in the Drews' barn before they started, and had hung only three May-baskets yet. However, the adventure was under way now.

"Willard, now it's my turn to carry the lantern."

"Judy, you can't."

"Why?"

"It might explode." The feeble flame gave one dispirited upward spurt at this encouragement, causing excitement in front.

"Oh, Ed!"

"Ed, make him put it out."

"Rena and Nat, you keep still. Judy's not scared, are you Judy?"

"No! Oh, no!"

"The lantern's a sick looking sight, and he can carry it if he wants to, but we don't need it."

"I like that. You tried to get me to let you carry it, Ed."

"Don't talk so much."

"Who started the talk?"

"Well, who's running this, anyway—you, Willard Nash?"

"There's a dog in that house."

"Sh!"

"But that dog's only a cocker spaniel. He can't hurt you."

"Judy, sh!"

Sh! Somebody was always saying that. It was part of the ceremony, which had been the same all three times. The procession was halting opposite the Nealy house. A whispered quarrel started every time they approached a house, and was hushed halfway through and not taken up again. The quarrel and the hush were part of the ceremony, too.

The Nealy house was small and harmless looking, and entirely dark, but they did not allow that to make them reckless. They stood looking warily across the dark street.

"But there's nobody there. Maggie Nealy's out, too, to-night, and her mother——"

"Sh!" Willard put a hand over Judith s mouth.

It smelled of kerosene, and she struggled, but did not make a noise. Just at this dramatic moment the Nealy's dog barked.

Judith could hear her heart beat and feel her damp feet getting really wet and cold.

"Now," Ed whispered, close to her ear and uncomfortably loud, and she fumbled in her basket. Willard jiggled the lantern dizzily over her shoulder, tissue paper tore under her fingers, and bonbons rattled. Hanging May-baskets was certainly hard on the May-baskets, and they were so pretty; pale coloured, like flowers.

"I can't find the right one. The marks are all falling off. The candy's falling out."

"We can't stand here all night. Here——"

"Willard, take your hands out. Not that one——"

"Willard and Judy stop fighting. That one will do. I'm going."

There was dead silence now, and Ed, clutching the wreck of a sizable crêpe-paper creation to the bosom of his white sweater, doubled into a crouching, boy scout attitude, crossed the road, and approached the house. Nothing but his own commendable caution delayed his approach. The small dog's dreams within were untroubled now. There were no signs of life.

He reached the front door, deposited the May-

basket with a force that further demolished it, and took to his heels. After another breathless wait the procession formed behind him and trailed after him up the road, hilly here, so that the market basket grew heavier.

"Some evening," Willard murmured to himself, not the rest of the world, but he sounded amiable.

"Willard."

"Well, kid."

"There wasn't anybody in that house. Ed knew it."

"There might have been. They might have come home."

"But they didn't . . . Willard, is this all there is to it?"

"What?"

"Hanging May-baskets. Throwing them down that way. I thought maybe they really hung them, on the doorknob—I thought——"

"Silly! Ed's going cross lots, and up the wood road to Larribees'. Good work. That will throw them off the track."

"Throw who off the track?"

"You scared? Want to go home?"

"Oh, no! But who? There's nobody chasing us. Nobody."

"No. We've got them fooled. It's some evening."

"Willard, where are the paddies?"

That was the question Judith had been wanting to ask more and more, for an hour, but it came in a choked voice, and nobody heard. They were plunging into a rough and stubbly wood lot, and hushing each other excitedly. Twigs caught at Judith's skirt, and it was hard to see your way, with the moon, small and high above the trees in Larribee's woods, only making the trees look darker. The wood road was little used and overgrown.

"If they get us in here!"

"They won't, Willard." Judith's voice trembled.

"Cry-baby!"

"I am not."

"Here, buck up. We're coming out right here, back of the carriage house. If Ed catches you crying he'll send you home."

But Ed had his mind upon higher things. "You girls stay here with the baskets. Don't move. Willard, you go right and I'll go left, and we'll meet at the carriage-house steps, if the coast is clear."

"If they get us——"

If! The boys crunched out of hearing on the gravel, awesome silence set in, and Rena and Natalie whispered; Judith was not to be awed.

Four May-baskets hung, and nobody objecting; dark cross-streets chosen instead of Main Street and no danger pursuing them there. If there was no danger in the whole town, why should there be in one little strip of woods, though it was dark and strange, and full of whispering noises? Judith had clung to Willard's hand in terror, turning into the cross-streets, and nothing came of it. She was not to be fooled any longer. There was no danger.

Not that she wanted to be chased. She did not know what she wanted. But she had come out into the dark to find something that was not there. She had been happier on the doorsteps thinking about it. This, then, was hanging May-baskets—all there was to it. But it was pleasant here in the dark, pleasanter than walking through mud, and quarrelling. Now Rena and Nat were quarrelling again.

"Get back there! Ed said not to move."

"They've been gone too long. Something's the matter."

"There they come. I hear them. Get back!"

They were coming, but something else was happening. Willard's three whistles sounded, then Ed's voice, and a noise of scuffling on the gravel—and a new boy's voice.

Rena and Natalie, upsetting their basket as

they started, and not noticing it, pushed through the trees and ran. Judith stood still and listened. She did not know the voice. It was shrill and clear. She could hear the words it said above the others' voices, all clamouring, now, at once. She held her breath and listened. She could not move.

"I don't want your damn May-baskets."

"Liar! Get back of him, Rena. Come on, Nat."

"You'll get hurt. Let me go. "

"Liar—Paddy!"

The magic word fell unheeded. The boy was laughing, and the laugh filled her ears, a splendid laugh, fearless and clear.

"Paddy!"

"I don't want your damn May-baskets."

"Paddy—Paddy!"

This time there was no answer. Judith, tearing at the hooks of her cape, and throwing it off as she ran, broke through the circling trees. Then she stopped and looked.

Rena stood high on the carriage-house steps and held the lantern. It wavered and swung in her hand, and threw a flickering circle of light round the group by the steps.

The sprawled shadows at their feet seemed to have an undue number of arms and legs, and the children were a struggling, uncertain mass of mo-

tion, hard to make out, like the shadows, but they were only four: Willard, grunting and groaning; Natalie attacking spasmodically in the rear, and the strange little boy, the enemy. He was the heart of the struggling group, and Judith looked only at him. She could do nothing but look, for Judith had never seen a little boy like this.

They were three against one, and the one was a match for them. He was slender and strong, holding his ground and making no noise. He was coatless and ragged shirted, and one sleeve of his shirt was torn, so that you could see how thin his shoulder was. He held his head high, and smiled as he fought. A shock of blond hair was tossed high above his forehead. He had a thin, white face, and dark jewels of flashing eyes. As she stood and looked, they met Judith's eyes, and Judith knew that she had never seen a boy like this, because there was no boy like this—no little boy so wild and strange and free, so ragged and brave. If he could come out of the dark, it was full of unguessable things, splendid and strange and new. Judith's heart beat hard, a hot feeling swept over her, and a queer mist came before her eyes. A wonderful boy; a fairy boy! What would they do to him? What did they do to paddies? There was no little boy like this in the world.

"Judy!" The others had seen her and were calling her. "Come on. Help get him down."

"He chased Willard round here."

"He led the gang last year."

"It's Neil Donovan."

"Get him down!"

Judith did not answer then. Her cheeks flamed red, and her eyes looked as big and dark as the stranger's, and her small hands clenched tight. It was only a minute that she stood so. The three were close to him, hiding him. She saw his face again, above Willard's pushing shoulder, and then—she could not see it.

"Judy, what's the matter? Come on!"

And Judith came. She plunged straight into the struggling group, and hammered at it indiscriminately with two small fists. She caught at a waving coat sleeve, and pulled it—Willard's, and it tore in her hands. She spotted Ed s white sweater, and beat at it fiercely, with all her strength.

"That's me, Judy. Cut it out!"

"Then let him go. Three to one is no fair. Let him go!" They did not hear her, or care which side she was on, or take the trouble to drive her away. Judith drew back and stood and looked at them, breathless and glowing and undefeated, for one long minute.

"Boy," she called then, softly, as if he could hear when the others could not, "wait! It's all right, boy. It's all right."

Then she charged up the steps at Rena. Judy, the most demure and faithful of allies, confronted Rena, amazingly but unmistakably changed to a foe; Judy, with her immaculate and enviable frock smirched and torn, and her sleek hair wildly tossed, her cheeks darkly flushed, and her eyes strange and shining; a Judy to be reckoned with and admired and feared—a new Judy.

"What's the matter? Are you crazy? What do you want?"

"Make them let him go. They've got to let him go."

"He's a paddy—Neil Donovan—a paddy."

"They've got to let him go. . . . Give that to me."

"What for? Judy, don't hurt me. Judy!"

Judith wasted no more words. She caught Rena's wrist, twisted it, and snatched the lantern out of her hand. She held it high above her head, and shook it recklessly.

"Don't, Judy! Don't!" The flame sputtered crazily. Judy still shook the lantern, dancing out of reach, and laughing. "Nat—everybody—stop Judy. She's making the lantern explode. Oh, Ed!"

Natalie heard, and then the others. They looked up at her, all of them. Rena and Natalie screamed. Willard started toward her. "Put it down, kid," he was calling.

"I'll put it down . . . Now boy."

There he was, with Ed's arm gripping his shoulders. He did not give any sign that he knew she was trying to help him, or that he wanted help. He was not afraid of the lantern, like the others. His black eyes were laughing at all of them—laughing at Judith, too. He was looking straight at Judith.

"Now, boy," she called, "now run!" and she gripped the lantern tight, swung it high, and dashed it to the ground.

It fell at the foot of the steps with a crash of breaking glass. The light sputtered out. The air was full of the smell of spilled kerosene. In the faint radiance that was not moonlight, but a glimmering reflection of it, more confusing than darkness, dim figures struggled and shrill voices were lifted.

"Get him. Hold him."

"Get the lantern."

"Get Judy."

"Hold him, Ed."

"That's me."

"Get him, Rena."

Judith laughed, and out of the dark he had come from, the dark of May-night, lit by a wishing moon, that grants your secret wish for better or for worse, irrevocably, a far-away laugh answered Judith's. The boy was gone.

CHAPTER THREE

MISS Judith Devereux Randall was getting into her first evening gown.

The Green River High School football team was giving its annual September concert and ball in Odd Fellows' Hall to-night. The occasion was as important to the school as a coming-out party. The new junior class, just graduated from seclusion upstairs to the big assembly room where the seniors were, made its first public appearance in society there. Judith was a junior now.

Her first dance, and her first evening gown; it was a memorable scene, fit to immortalize with the first love-letter and the first proposal, in a series of pictures of great moments in a girl's life—chosen by some masculine illustrator, touchingly confident that he knows what the great moments of a girl's life are. Judith seemed to be taking this moment too calmly for one.

The dress lay ready on the bed, fluffy and light and sheer, a white dream of a dress, with two unopened florist's boxes beside it, but there was no picturesque disarray of excited toilet-making in

her big, brightly lighted room, and no dream-promoting candlelight. And there were no pennants or football trophies disfiguring the daintily flowered wall paper, and no pictures or programs in the mirror of the dainty dressing-table; there was no other young girl's room in town where they were prohibited, but there was no other room so charming as Judith's, all blue-flowered chintz and bird's-eye maple and white fur rugs, and whiter covers and curtains.

Judith was the most charming and immaculate thing in the room, as she stood before the cheval-glass, bare armed and slim and straight in be-ruffled, beribboned white, pinning the soft, pale braids tight around her small, high-poised head. Quite the most charming thing, and Norah, fingering the dress on the bed disapprovingly, and giving her keen, sidelong glances, was aware of it, but did not believe in compliments, even to the creature she loved best in the world.

Her mouth was set and her brown eyes were bright with the effort of repressing them. Judith, seeing her face in the glass, turned suddenly and slipped her arms round the formidable old creature's neck, and laughed at her.

"Don't you think I'm perfectly beautiful?" she demanded. "If you really love me, why not tell me so?"

"Your colour's good." Judith pressed a delicately flushed cheek to Norah's, and attempted a butterfly kiss, which she evaded grimly. "Good enough—healthy and natural."

"Oh, no. I made it. Oh, with hot water and then cold, I mean. Nana, don't begin about rouge. Don't be silly. That red stuff in the box on mother's dresser is only nail paste, truly."

"Who sent the flowers?"

"Look and see."

"Much you care, if you'll let me look."

"Do you want me to care?"

"Much you care about the flowers or the party."

Judith had caught up the alluring dress without a second glance, and slipped it expertly over her head, and was jerking capably at the fastenings.

"With the spoiled airs of you, and Willard Nash sending to Wells for flowers, when his father clerked in a drygoods store at his age——"

"Oh, carnations are cheap—or he wouldn't get them."

"These aren't cheap, then."

The smaller box was full of white violets.

"Give them to me. No, you can't see the card. You don't deserve to. You're too cross, and besides you wouldn't like it. Do my two top hooks. Now, am I perfectly beautiful?"

Under her capable hands a pretty miracle had been going on, common enough, but always new. Ruffle above ruffle, the soft, shapeless mass of white had shaken itself into its proper lines and contours, lightly, like a bird's plumage settling itself, and with it the change that comes when a woman with the inborn, unteachable trick of wearing clothes puts on a perfect gown, had come to her slight girl's figure. It looked softer, rounder, and more lightly poised. Her throat looked whiter above the encircling folds of white. Her shy half smile was sweeter. The white violets, caught to her high girdle, were sweeter, too.

Norah surrendered, her voice husky and reluctant.

"You're too good for them."

"For the G. H. S. dance? For Willard?" Judith pretended great humility: "Nana!"

"There's others you're more than too good for. Others——"

"Nana, don't."

"Come here." Norah put two heavy hands on her shoulders and regarded her grimly. It was the kind of look that Judith used to associate with second sight, and dread. It was quite formidable still. But Judith met it steadily, with something mature and assured about her look that had

nothing to do with the softness and sweetness of her in her fluffy draperies, something that had no place in the heart of a child; something that Norah saw.

"Too good for them, and you know it," pronounced Norah. "You know it too well. You know too many things. A heart of gold you've got, but your head will rule your heart."

"Nonsense." Norah permitted herself to be kissed, still looking forbidding, but holding Judith tight.

"Little white lamb, may you find what's good enough for you," she conceded, unexpectedly, "and may you know it when you find it."

"You're an old dear, and you're good enough for me."

Downstairs there was a more critical audience to face. Judith saw it in the library door, and stood still on the stair landing, looking down. She held her head high, and coloured faintly. She looked very slender and white against the dark woodwork of the hall. The Randall house had been renovated the year before—becoming ten years older in the process, early Colonial instead of a comfortable mixture of late Colonial and mid-Victorian. The hall was particularly Colonial, and a becoming background for Judith, but the dark-haired lady in the door had no more

faith in compliments than Norah, and there was a worried wrinkle in her low forehead to-night, as if her mind were on other things.

"Will I do, mother?"

"It's a good little gown, but there's something wrong with the neck line. You're really going then?"

"I thought I would."

"Be back by half-past ten. We're going to have some cards here. The Colonel likes you to pass things."

"I thought father's head ached."

"He's sleeping it off."

"I—wanted him to see how I looked."

"I can't see why you go."

"I thought I would. I'll go outside now, and wait for Willard."

Judith closed the early Colonial door softly behind her, and settled down on the steps. She arranged her coat, not the one her mother lent her for state occasions, but a white polo coat of her own, with due regard for her ruffles and her violets. The violets were from Colonel Everard. Norah, with her tiresome prejudice against the Everards, and mother, who thought and talked so much about them that she was almost tiresome, too, were both wrong about this party. She did want to go.

The church clock was striking nine. There was nothing deep toned or solemn about the chime; it was rather tinny, but she liked it. It sounded wide awake, as if things were going to happen. Nine, and the party was under way. The concert was almost over. The concert was only for chaperones and girls who were afraid of not getting their dance orders filled. The truly elect arrived just in time to dance. Some of them were passing the house already. Judith saw girls with light-coloured gowns showing under dark coats, and swathing veils that preserved elaborate coiffures. Bits of conversation, monosyllabic and formal, to fit the clothes, drifted across the lawn to her.

She had not been allowed to help decorate the hall, but she had driven with Willard to Nashes' Corners for goldenrod, and when they carried it in, big, glowing bundles of it, she had seen fascinating things: Japanese lanterns, cheesecloth in yellow and white, the school colours, still in the piece, and full of unguessable possibilities, and a rough board table, the foundation of the elaborately decorated counter where Rena and other girls would serve the fruit punch. All the time she dressed she had been listening for the music of Dugan's orchestra, and caught only tantalizing strains of tunes that she could not identify. There was a sameness about the repertoire. Most of

the tunes sounded unduly sentimental and resigned. But now they were playing their star number, a dramatic piece of program music called "A Day on the Battlefield."

The day began with bird notes and bugle calls, but was soon enlivened by cavalry charges and cannonades. The drum, and an occasional blank cartridge, very telling in effect, were producing them now. Judith listened eagerly.

She needed friends of her own age for the next two years, but she must not identify herself with them too closely, because she would have wider social opportunities by and by; that was what her mother said, and she did not contest it; by and by, but this party was to-night.

Willard was coming for her now, half an hour ahead of time, as usual. He crossed the lawn, and sat heavily down on the steps.

"Hello. Don't talk," said Judith.

Willard was silent only long enough to turn this remark over in his mind, and decide that she could not mean it, but that was five minutes, for all his mental processes were slow. Down in the hall the last of the heroes was dying, and Dugan's orchestra rendered Taps sepulchrally. Judith drew a long breath of shivering content.

"Cold?" inquired Willard.

"No."

"You're looking great to-night."

"In the dark? In an old polo coat?"

"You always look great."

Judith was aware of an ominous stir beside her, and changed her position.

"Oh, Judy."

"When you know I won't let you hold my hand, what makes you try?"

"If I didn't try, how would I know?" said Willard neatly.

"Oh, if you don't know without trying," Judith sighed. The cannonade in the hall was over, and the night was empty without it.

"They took in thirteen dollars and fifty-two cents selling tickets for to-night." Willard, checked upon sentimental subjects, proceeded to facts. He had so many at command that he could not be checked.

"Who did?"

"The team. They divide it. Only this year they've got to let the sub-team in on it, the faculty made them, and they're sore. And there's a sub on the reception committee."

"I don't care."

"You ought to. A sub, and a roughneck. The sub-team is a bunch of roughnecks, but he's the worst. On the reception committee! But they'll take it out of him."

"Who? The reception committee?"

"No, the girls. They won't dance with him. He won't get a decent name on his card. Roughneck, keeping Ed off the team. He's an Irish boy."

"An Irish boy?" Something, vague as an unforgotten dream that comes back at night, though you are too busy to recall it in waking hours, urged Judith to protest. "So is the senior president Irish."

"No, the vice-president." There was a wide distinction between the two offices. "Besides"—this was a wider distinction—"Murph lives at the Falls."

Living at the Falls, the little settlement at the head of the river, and lunching at noon, in the empty schoolhouse, out of tin boxes, with a forlorn assembly of half a dozen or so, was a handicap that few could live down.

"Murph?"

"The team calls him Murphy. I don't know why. They're crazy about him. He lives a half mile north of the Falls. Walking five miles a day to learn Latin! He's a fool and a roughneck, but he can play ball. Yesterday on Brown's field——"

Willard started happily upon technicalities of football formations. Judith stopped listening.

He could talk on unaided, pausing only for an occasional yes or no.

Brown's field! It was a tree-fringed stretch of level grass set high at the edge of the woods, on the other side of the river, with glimpses of the river showing through the trees far below. Here, on long autumn afternoons, sparkling and cool, but golden at the heart, ending gloriously in red, sudden sunsets, football practice went on every day; shifting here and there, mysteriously, over the field, the arbitrary evolutions that were football, the shuffling, and shouting, and panting silence; on rugs and sweaters under the trees, an audience of girls, shivering delightfully, or holding some hero's sweater, too proud to be cold.

Judith had seen all this through Willard's eyes, or from a passing carriage, but now she would go herself, go perhaps every day. Her mother would let her. She would not understand, but she would let her, just as she had to-night. Judith could be part of the close-knit life of the school in the last two years there—the years that counted. The party was a test and her mother had met it favourably. That was why she was glad to go, as nearly as she understood. She did not know quite what she wanted of the party, only how very much she wanted to go.

Willard was asking a question insistently: "Didn't he do pretty work?"

"Who?"

"Why, the fellow I'm telling you about—the roughneck."

"Roughneck," said Judith dreamily. The word had a fine, strong sound. Willard was holding her hand again, and she felt too comfortable and content to stop him.

The orchestra down the street was playing the number that usually ended its programs, a medley of plantation melodies. They were never such a strain on the resources of a hard-working but only five-piece orchestra as the ambitious, martial selections, and here, heard across the dark, they were beautiful: plaintive and thrillingly sweet. "Old Kentucky Home," was the sweetest of all, lonely and sad as youth, and insistent as youth, claiming its own against an alien world.

"Oh, Willard!" breathed Judith. Then, in quite another tone, "Oh, Willard!"

Encouraged by her silence, he was reaching for her other hand, and slipping an arm round her waist.

"You feel so soft," objected Judith frankly, getting up. "I do hope I'll never fall in love with a fat man. Come on, let's go!"

She waited for him politely on the sidewalk, and

permitted her arm to be duly grasped. Willard, sulky and silent, but preserving appearances, piloted her dutifully down the street. Willard's silences were rare, and Judith usually made the most of them, but she did not permit this one to last. She did not want any one, even Willard, to be unhappy to-night.

"Willard."

"What?"

"Don't take such long steps, or I can't keep up with you. You're so tall."

"Do you want to be late?"

"Oh, no! Are we?"

"No."

"But there's only one couple behind us, and the music's stopped."

"It takes half an hour to get the chairs moved out."

"Willard."

"Well?"

"Is the first dance a grand march and circle?"

"No, that's gone out. They have contras instead, but the first is a waltz."

"Willard, mother said I mustn't dance contras, but I shall—with you."

"Well!"

"Don't you want me to?"

"Yes."

"Willard, are you cross with me?"

"No." They were in front of the Odd Fellows' Building now. The door was open. The pair behind them crowded past and clattered hurriedly up the bare, polished stairs. The orchestra could be heard tuning industriously above. They were almost late, but Willard drew her into a corner of the entrance hall, and pressed her hand ardently.

"Judy, I couldn't be cross with you."

"Don't be too sure!" Judith laughed, and ran upstairs ahead of him.

"There's the ladies' dressing-room. I'll get the dance orders and meet you outside."

There was a whispering, giggling crowd in the dressing-room, mostly seniors, girls she did not know, but they seemed to know her, and she was conscious of curious looks at her hair and dress. It was the simplest dress in the room, and her mother would not have approved of the other dresses, but Judith did. There was something festive about the bright colours, too bright most of them: sharp pinks, and cold, hard blues. There was a yellow dress on a brunette, who was cheapened by the crude colour, and a scarlet dress too bright for any one to wear successfully on a big, pretty blond girl, who almost could. Judith smelled three distinct kinds of cheap talcum powder, and preferred them all to her own un-

scented French variety. She had a moment of sudden loneliness. Was she so glad to be here, after all?

It was only a moment. The tuning of instruments outside broke off, and the first bars of a waltz droned invitingly out: "If you really love me," the song that had been in her ears all the evening, a flimsy ballad of the year, hauntingly sweet, as only such short-lived songs can be. Moving to the tune of it, Judith crowded with the other girls out of the dressing-room.

The hall was transformed. It was not the room she had dreamed of, a great room, dimly lit, peopled with low-talking dancers, circling through the dimness. The place looked smaller decorated, and the decorations themselves seemed to have shrunk since she saw them. The lanterns had been hung only where nails were already driven, and under the supervision of the janitor, who would not permit them to be lighted. The cheesecloth was conspicuous nowhere except around the little stage, which it draped in tight, mathematically measured festoons. Beneath, under the misleading legend, "G. H. S.," painted in yellow on a suspended football, Dugan's orchestra performed its duties faithfully, with handkerchiefs guarding wilted collars.

The goldenrod, tortured and wired into a

screen to hide the footlights, was drooping away already and showing the supporting wires. The benches were stacked against the wall, all but an ill-omened row designed for wall-flowers, and the floor was cleared and waxed. But little patches of wax that were not rubbed in lurked for unwary feet, and there were clouds of dust in the air. In one corner of the hall most of the prominent guests of the evening were attempting to obtain dance orders at once, or to push their way back with them to the young ladies they were escorting.

These ladies, and other ladies without escorts, were crowding each other against the stacked benches and maneuvering for positions where their dance orders would fill promptly. The atmosphere was one of strife and stress. But Judith found no fault with it. She was not aware of it.

In a corner near the stage, by the closed door of the refreshment-room, a boy was standing alone. He was tearing up his dance order. It was empty, and he was making no further attempts to fill it. He tore it quite unostentatiously so that no young lady disposed to be amused by his defeat could see anything worth staring at in his performance, and he was forgotten in his corner. But Judith stared.

She had remembered him tall, but he was only a little taller than herself. His black suit was shiny,

and a size too small for him, but it was carefully brushed, and he wore it with an air. His hair was darker than she remembered, a pale, soft brown. It was too long, and it curled at the temples. He stood squarely, facing the room, as if he did not care what anybody did to him, but there was a look about his mouth as if he cared. He raised his eyes. They were darker than she remembered, darker and stranger than any eyes in the world. They looked hurt, but there was a laugh in them, too, and across the hall they were looking straight at Judith.

"Here you are. I've got myself down for all your contras. Just in time."

Willard, mopping his brow, slipping on a patch of wax, and saving himself with a skating motion, brought up triumphantly beside her, waving two dance orders. Judith pushed them away, and said something—she hardly knew what.

"What, Judy? What's that? You're engaged for this? You can't dance it with me?"

"No. No, I can't."

Judith slipped past him, and started across the floor. The music was louder now, as if you were really meant to dance, and dance with the person you wanted to most. The floor was filling now with dancers stepping forward awkwardly, but turning into different creatures when they danced,

caught by the light, sure swing of the music, whirling and gliding. The words sang themselves to Judith, the silly, beautiful words:

Please don't keep me waiting.
Won't you let me know
That you really love me?
Tell—me—so.

A girl in red was dancing in a quick, darting sort of way, in and out, among the others, and her dress was beautiful, too, like a flower. The boy in the corner was watching it. He did not see Judith come.

"I thought you couldn't be real. When I never saw you again I thought I had dreamed you."

Judith said it softly and breathlessly, and he did not hear. She put her hand on his arm, and he turned and looked at her.

"Don't you remember me?" Judith was too happy to be hurt even by this. The light, sweet music called to her. "Don't you remember? Never mind! Come and dance with me."

CHAPTER FOUR

WILLARD stood still and stared after Judith for one bewildered minute; that was as long as he could stand still. Odd Fellows' Hall had ceased to afford standing-room.

The floor was filling and more than filling with determined young persons who were there to dance, and looked as if they had never had any aim but to dance. The enthralled silence, which was more general than conversation, advertised it. Even acknowledged belles, like the girl in red, coquetted incidentally, with significant but brief confidences and briefer upward glances. There was an alarming concentration, intent as youth itself, to be read in their unsmiling faces and eager eyes.

They danced quite wonderfully, most of them, as only country-bred young people can, with free-limbed young bodies, more used to adventuring in the open air than to dancing, but attuned to the rhythm of the dance by right of their youth. The old-fashioned waltz, that our grandmothers lost their hearts to the time of, still prevailed in

Green River; not the jerkier performance that was already opening the way for the one-step and the dance craze in larger centres, but the old waltz, with the first beat of each measure heavily emphasized—a slow swinging, beautiful dance, and they danced it with all their hearts.

In and out among them, two slender, quick-turning figures were making an intricate way. The girl danced delicately and surely, a faint, half smile parting her lips, her small, smooth head erect, the silvery gold hair that crowned it shimmering and pale in the uncompromising light of the newly installed electric chandeliers, her eyes intent on the boy.

His performance was not expert, but it had a charm all its own. He put a great deal of strength into it, and made it evident that he possessed still more; strength enough to master the art of dancing once and for all, by the sheer force of it, if he cared to exert it, and a laughing light in his eyes, as if dancing was not important enough for that, and nothing else was.

An ambitious pair, experimenting with the dip waltz, just introduced that year, and pausing on the most awkward spots in the crowded floor, blocked his path, and he swung heavily out of their way just in time, squaring his chin and holding his head a shade higher. The girl in red

was whirled toward him in double-quick time, and he dodged, miscalculated his distance, but met the shock of her squarely, whisking Judith out of her way.

"Good try, Murph," her partner called.

Willard regarded the encounter disapprovingly from the door of the gentlemen's dressing-room, to which he had edged his way. His was not an expressive countenance, and that was a protection to him just now. He was bewildered and deeply hurt, but he merely looked fat and slightly puzzled, as usual.

"Judy turn you down?" inquired his friend Mr. Ward, also watching from the dressing-room door, with the few other gentlemen who were without partners for this dance. It was the most important dance of the evening, for you danced it with the lady of your choice, or with nobody. It cemented new intimacies or foreshadowed the breaking of old; settled anew the continually agitated question of "who was going with who."

"Judy turn you down?" said Mr. Ward, but he meant it as a pleasantry. Mr. Willard Nash was not often turned down, even at this early age. He was too eligible.

"Rena turn you down, Ed?"

"Yes." Mr. Ward became suddenly confidential, and lowered his voice. "Mad. She

wanted me to get her a shinguard to mount tintypes on—tintypes of the team."

"Buy it or steal it?" inquired Willard sarcastically.

"I offered to buy it," his friend confessed, "buy her a new pair, but she wants one that's been used."

"You spoil Rena. You can't spoil a girl." They laughed wisely. "It don't pay."

"Mad with Judy?"

"Well—no," said Willard magnanimously. He thought quite rapidly, as his brain, not overworked at other times, could do in emergencies. "My feet hurt. Pumps slip at the heel. I've been stuffing them out. Judy came with me, but I had to be excused for this dance."

"Good thing for him."

"Who?"

"For Murph—for Neil Donovan. They'll all dance with him if she does; though Judy don't know that. She's not stuck on herself, and never will be. I didn't know she knew Murph."

"Well, you know it now," said Willard shortly, his man-of-the-world composure failing him. Judith was circling nearer now, slender and desirable. He hesitated between an angry glare and a forgiving smile, but she did not look to see which he chose. She whirled quickly by.

"Smooth little dancer, and she's no snob. Judy's all right," said Ed. "Watch Murph! He's catching on—never danced till last night. Some of the fellows taught him. He never danced with a girl before."

"If my feet hurt," remarked Mr. Nash irrelevantly, and without the close attention from his friend which this important announcement called for, "I may not dance at all to-night."

Willard stopped abruptly. "What do you know about that"; a voice was saying, in the rear of the dressing-room; he stiffly refrained from turning to see whose, "Judith is dancing the first dance with Neil Donovan!"

Judith was dancing the first dance with Neil Donovan. It was social history already, accepted as such, and not further discussed, even by Willard. But many epoch-making events are not even so much discussed, they look so simple on the face of them. We cross a room, and change the course of our lives by crossing it, and few people even observe that we have crossed the room.

If Judith had affected the course of her life materially by crossing the room to the strange boy, she did not seem to be thinking of it just now. She was not thinking at all. She was only dancing, following her partner's erratic course quite faithfully, and quite intent on doing so; feeling every

beat of the music, and showing it, pink-cheeked and sparkling eyed, and pleasantly excited, but nothing more.

The wistful and dreamy look was gone from her eyes, and her half-formed desire for something to happen this evening, something that had never happened before, was gone from her, too. She felt content with whatever was going to happen, and deeply interested in it, and particularly interested in dancing.

They had danced almost in silence, rather a grim silence at first, but now that the boy could let the music carry him with it, and was beginning to trust it, too, the silence was comfortable. But the few words he managed to say were worth listening to and answering, not to be dreamed through and ignored, like Willard's. His voice was not as she remembered it, and that was interesting, too, deeply significant, though she could not have said why.. Everything seemed unaccountably interesting to-night.

"I thought it was louder," she said, "or higher—or something."

"What?"

"Your voice."

It was quite husky and low, and he pronounced a word here and there with a brogue like Norah's, only pleasanter, with a kind of singing sound. It

was never the word you expected. You had to watch for it. She could hear it now.

"Won't you please tell me who you are?"

"I know who you are, and I know where you live."

"Where do I?"

"At the Falls, and I know when you moved there—five years ago, or six."

"Six. How do you know?"

"Oh, I know."

As you grew older, and learned to call more boys and girls in the school by name, and more of the clerks in the shops, you discovered new people in the town where you thought you knew everybody, and it made the town infinitely large. But this boy had not been so near her, or she would have seen him. He could not have been in school with her. He must have worked on a farm and studied by himself with the grammar-school teacher at the Falls, and taken special examinations to enter the Junior class this year, as Willard said that some boy at the Falls was doing. He must be that boy or Judith would surely have seen him.

She nodded her head wisely. "I know."

"You know a lot." In his soft brogue this sounded like the most complimentary thing that could be said.

"But you don't remember me." This had troubled her at first. Now it seemed like the most delicious of jokes, and they laughed at it together.

"That was the first thing you said to me."

"Isn't it queer"—Judith's eyes widened and darkened as if it were something more than queer, something far worse—"so queer! I can't think what the first thing was that you said to me."

They confronted this problem in silence, staring at each other with wide-open eyes. Though they were circling smoothly at last, carried on by the slow, sweet music, so that they hardly seemed to be moving at all, and though he did not really move his head, the boy's eyes seemed to Judith to be coming nearer to hers, nearer all the time. They were beautiful eyes, deep brown, and very clear. His brown hair grew in a squarish line across his forehead, and waved softly at the temples. It looked as if he had brushed it hard there to brush the curl out, but it was curliest there.

"You've got the brownest eyes," said Judith.

"You've got the biggest eyes. Won't you tell me your name?"

Judith did not answer. She looked away from the disconcerting brown eyes and down at her hand, against his shoulder, her own little hand, with the careful manicure and the dull polish that

was all her mother permitted; bare of rings, though Norah had given her a beautiful garnet ring for Christmas. How shiny his coat-sleeve was, and her hand looked unfamiliar to her—not like her own at all. She pressed tighter against his shoulder to steady herself.

The music was growing quicker and louder, working up gradually but surely into a breathless crescendo that meant the end of the dance. It whirled them dizzily about. The sleepy spell of the dance broke in this final crash of noise, and as it broke a sudden panic caught Judith.

What had she been saying to this boy? She had never talked like this to a boy before. And why was she dancing with him? She ought to be dancing with Willard—Willard, waiting there in the dressing-room door with her dance order in his hand, with the patient and puzzled look in his eyes, with brick-red colour in his cheeks from the affront she had subjected him to. What would Willard think of her? What would her mother think? And who was this boy? Just what the children had called him in taunting screams, on that long-ago May night, and she would have liked to scream it now—a paddy.

Instead, she lifted her head, no longer afraid of the boy's brown eyes, and said it, as cruelly as she could, in her soft and clear little voice:

"Paddy," she said; "a paddy from Paddy Lane."

She looked defiantly into his eyes, but they did not grow angry. They only grew very soft and kind, and they laughed at her. She wanted to look away from the laughter in them, but she could not look away from the kindness. Now she was not angry with him any more, but glad she was dancing with him. She knew she never wanted to stop dancing.

"Paddy?" He thought she had said it to remind him of that May night; he was remembering it now. "Are you that little girl?"

"Yes."

"The little girl who broke the lantern?"

"Yes," said Judith proudly.

"And had such long black legs, and went scuttling across the lawn, and screaming out to me—that funny little girl?"

"But I did break the lantern," said Judith.

All the bravest stories that she had made up in the dark to put herself to sleep with at night, all the perilous adventures of land and sea, camp fire or pirate ship, began with the breaking of that lantern, and the boy she rescued had been her companion upon them, her brushwood boy, her own boy. She had found him at last, and he was laughing—laughing at her.

"Sure you did. As if I couldn't have broken away from a bunch of fool kids, without being doped with the smell of kerosene, and yelled at by another fool kid. Sure you broke the lantern. How mad I was."

"You didn't remember." It was not a joke any longer now, but a tragedy, and Judith felt overwhelmed by it, alone in the world. "You forgot, and I—remembered."

The brown eyes and the gray met in one last long look and when the brown eyes saw the hurt in Judith's, the laughter died out of them. Again they seemed to be growing nearer and nearer to hers, but this time Judith was not afraid, she was glad.

"If you didn't save my life then, you did tonight." It came in a husky burst of confidence, straight from his shy boy's heart, very rare and very precious. Judith caught her breath.

"Oh, did I? Did I?"

"Yes. This crowd here had me mad—crazy mad. I was going home. I was going to get off the team. I wasn't going to school next week, and I've worked my hands off to get there. Maybe you remembered and I forgot, but—I won't forget again. You were that little girl." It was not a slight to the little girl she used to be, but a tribute to the girl she was; that was what looked out of his

brown eyes at Judith, and sang through the brogue in his voice.

"You were that little girl—you!"

"Yes," breathed Judith; "yes!"

They whirled faster and faster. This was really the end of the dance, and this dance could never come again. Judith held tight to his shiny shoulder, breathless, hurrying to part with her secret and strip herself bare of mystery generously in a breath. All sorts of barriers might come between them, she might put them there herself, and she was quite aware of it, but not yet, not until the music stopped.

"My name's Judith—Judith Randall. Call me Judy."

CHAPTER FIVE

COLONEL EVERARD sat at the head of his dinner table. A little dinner for twelve was well under way at the Birches. Mrs. Everard was confined to her tower suite tonight with one of the sudden headaches which unkind critics held were likely to come when the Colonel entertained. Randolph Sebastian, his secretary, had superintended the arrangements for the dinner.

Pink roses, rather too many of them, were massed on the big, round table. Rather too much polished silver was to be seen on it; the most ornate candlesticks in the Everard collection, and a too complete array of small, scattered objects, each with a possible but not an essential function, littering a cloth already complicated by elaborate inserts of lace. But the brilliantly lighted, overdecorated table was effective enough in the big, darkly wainscoted room, a little island of light and colour.

The room was characterless, but finely and generously proportioned, and not so blatantly new as the rest of the colonel's house still looked. Against

the dark walls the pale-coloured gowns around the table were charming. Indeed, most of the gowns were designed for this setting.

For there were no outsiders among the Colonel's guests to-night. Sometimes there were distinguished outsiders, politicians and other big men, diverted from triumphant tours through larger centres by the Colonel's influence, and by his courtesy exhibited to Green River after they had dined, or bigger men still, whose comings and goings the public press was not permitted to chronicle. Sometimes, too, there were outsiders on probation, the outer fringe of Green River society, admitted to formal functions, and hoping in vain to penetrate to intimate ones; ladies flustered and flattered, gentlemen sulky but flattered, conscious that each appearance here might be their last, and trying to seem indifferent to the fact.

But this was the Colonel's inner circle, gathered by telephone at twenty-four hours' notice, as they so often were. No course that the chef had contributed to the rather too elaborate menu was new to them. The Pol Roger which the big English butler was just starting on his second round was of the vintage year usually to be found on the Colonel's wine list, and on most intelligently supervised wine lists. A dinner for twelve, like plenty of little dinners elsewhere, no more correct

and no less, but it had this to distinguish it; it was being served in Green River.

Served complete from hors-d'œuvres to liqueurs, in a New England town where high tea had been the fashion not ten years ago, and church suppers were still important occasions—where you were rich on five thousand a year, and there were not a dozen capitalists secure of so much, where a second maid was an object of pride, and there was no butler except the Colonel's. And he had imported this butler and his chef and his wines, but not his guests; they were quite as impressive, quite able to appreciate his hospitality, if not to return it in kind, and they were all but one native products of Green River.

The youngest guest was eating mushrooms *sous cloche* in contented silence at the Colonel's left. The scene was not new to her. She could not remember her first party here; she was probably the only person in Green River who could pass over that momentous occasion so lightly. She had grown up as the only child in the inner circle. She had been privileged to excuse herself, when the formal succession of courses at some holiday function was too much for her, and read fairy tales on a cushion by the library fire, out of the fat, purple edition de luxe of the "Arabian Nights" that was always waiting for her there.

Though her white ruffled skirts had grown long now, and her silvery gold braids were pinned up, and she was allowed to fill an empty place at the Colonel's table whenever he asked her, if not quite on his regular dinner list yet, Judith was not much changed from that wide-eyed child, and to-night her eyes looked sleepy and soft, as if she had serious thoughts of the cushion by the fire and the fairy book still.

The scene was not new, but it kept a fascination for her, like a transformation scene in a pantomime. Mr. J. Cleveland Kent, the manager of the shoe factory, who had taken her in to dinner, had been leaning out of a factory window in his shirt-sleeves, his black hair tumbled, and badly in need of a shave, when she passed on her way home from school. He looked mysterious and interesting in a dinner coat, like her idea of an Italian nobleman.

When Judith knocked at the kitchen door to deliver a note, Mrs. Theodore Burr, in a pink cooking apron, corsetless, and with her beautiful yellow hair in patent curlers, had been blackening the kitchen stove, and quarrelling with the furnace man about an overcharge of fifty cents on his monthly bill. The Burrs had no maid. Theodore Burr had been assisting Judge Saxon ever since he passed his bar examinations, but he was not

admitted to partnership yet. This was beginning to make gossip, for he worked hard. He had broken his dinner engagement to-night, as he often did, to stay at home and work. Randolph Sebastian, thé secretary, with the queer, hybrid foreign name, and thin face and ingratiating brown eyes, had his place at the table.

Mrs. Burr, stately and slender now in jetted black, the lowest cut gown in the room, her yellow hair fluffing and flaring into an unbelievable number of well-filled-out puffs, was chattering to the Colonel in a low voice, so that Judith could not understand, and breaking into French at intervals—Green River High School French, but she spoke it with an air, narrowing her blue-gray eyes after an alluring fashion she had and laughing her full-toned laugh. She was a full-blown, emphatic creature, though she had been married only three years, and was Lil Gaynor still to half the town.

Auburn-haired little Mrs. Kent had been lying down all the afternoon, as her disapproving domestic had informed any one who inquired at the door in a shrill voice that did not promote repose. She was very piquant and enticing now, with her bright, slanting hazel eyes, and a contagious laugh, but her dinner partner, Judith's father, was tired and hard to amuse. He looked very boy-

ish when he was tired; his blue eyes looked large and pathetic.

The other two young women and Judith's mother, whose dark, low-browed Madonna beauty was gracious and fresh to-night, set off by her clear-blue gown, with a gardenia caught in her sheer, white scarf, deserved the Honourable Joseph Grant's flowery name for them, the Three Graces.

Before the Colonel's time and Judith's the Honourable Joe had been the most important man in Green River, and in evening things, and after a properly concocted cocktail he still looked it, florid and portly and well set-up, with a big voice that could still sound hearty though it rang rather empty and hollow sometimes. He looked ten years younger than his old friend, Judge Saxon. The Judge's coat was getting shiny at the seams, and—this appeared even more unfortunate to Judith—he was in the habit of pointing out that it was shiny, and without embarrassment. Mrs. Saxon's pearl-gray satin was of excellent quality, but of last year's cut, and the modest neck was filled in with the net guimpe which she affected at informal dinners. The Saxons were not quite in the picture, but they were always very kind to Judith.

And if they were not in the picture, Mrs. Joseph

Grant, certainly not the youngest woman in the room, though she was not the oldest, occupied the centre of it.

She was like the picture of the beautiful princess on the hill of glass, in a book of Judith's, and besides, she had once been a real débutante, of the kind that Judith liked to read about in novels, before the Honourable Joe brought her from Boston to Green River. Judith liked to look at her better than any one here except Colonel Everard.

"Cosmopolitan—ten years ahead of Wells, or any town in your state; real give and take in the table talk; really pretty women; the same little group of people rubbing wits against each other day after day and getting them sharpened instead of dulled by it; a concentrated, pocket edition of a social life, but complete—nothing provincial about it," a very distinguished outsider had said after his last week-end with the Colonel.

But he was fresh from a visit to the state capital, the most provincial city in the state when the legislature was not in session; also he had a known weakness for pretty women. Green River did not admire the Colonel's circle so unreservedly, but Green River was jealous. Whatever you thought of it, it was made of fixed and unpromising material, and making it was no mean achieve-

ment, and the man at the head of the table looked capable of it, and of bigger things.

The Colonel was a big man and a public character, and as with many bigger men, you could divide the facts of his life into two classes: what everybody knew and what nobody knew. If the known facts were not the most dramatic ones, they were dramatic enough. He was sixty now. At fifteen he had been a student in a small theological seminary, working for his board on his uncle's farm, and engaged to the teacher of the district school, who helped him with his Greek at night. He gave up the ministry for the law, used his law practice as a stepping-stone into state politics, climbed gradually into national politics, built up a fortune somehow—these were the days of big graft—married for money and got an assured position in Washington society thrown in, and soon after his marriage chose Green River as a basis of operations, spending a winter month in Washington which later lengthened to three, ostensibly for the sake of his wife's health. The title of Colonel came from serving on the Governor's staff in an uneventful year. He had held no very important office, but his importance to his party in state and national politics was not to be measured by that.

White haired, slightly built, managing with per-

fectly apparent tricks of carriage and dress to look taller than he was, he was the effective figure in this rather unusually good-looking group of people. Just now he was lighting a fresh cigarette for Mrs. Burr so gracefully that even Judge Saxon must enjoy watching, so Judith thought, though there was a tradition that he did not like women to smoke. Shocking the Judge was one of their favourite games here. It was only a game. Of course they could never shock anybody. They were quite harmless people, too grown up to be very interesting, but almost always kind, and always gay.

The Colonel's profile was really beautiful through the curling, bluish smoke, and Judith liked his quick, flashing smile. He turned now and smiled at Judith. Her own smile was charming, a faint, half smile, that never knew whether to turn into a real smile or to go away and not come again, but was always just on the point of deciding.

"Is our débutante bored?"

"Oh, no; I was just thinking. No."

"She's blushing. Look at her."

"Yes, look at a real one. Do you good, Lil," agreed the Judge, and Mrs. Burr rubbed a pink cheek with her table napkin, exhibited it daintily, and laughed.

"Rose-white youth! But she doth protest too

much." The Honourable Joe was fond of quotations, and often tried to make his remarks sound like them, when he could not recall appropriate ones, raising a solemn fat finger to emphasize them: "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

"Wrong, wrong thoughts," supplied Randolph Sebastian, so gravely that the Honourable Joe accepted the amendment, and looked worried, as only the thought of losing his grip on Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations" could worry him at the end of a perfect meal.

"Wrong thought?" he repeated, in a puzzled voice.

"Thinking's barred here. What's the penalty, Judge?"

"You aren't likely to get it inflicted on you, so I won't tell you, Lil."

"No, I don't think; I act," Mrs. Burr admitted cheerfully. She always became a shade more cheerful just when you expected her to lose her temper.

"How true that is," observed Mr. Sebastian gently.

"Ranny!"

"Didn't you play auction with me last night? We're out just——"

"Don't tell me. I can't think in anything

beyond three figures. Ted's doing higher mathematics over it. That's why he's home, really. I'll play with you again to-night, for your sins."

"For my sins!" He made melancholy eyes, as if he were really confessing them. Mr. Sebastian always pretended a deep devotion to Mrs. Burr. Judith thought it was one of the silliest of their games.

"But what was Judy thinking about?" demanded Mrs. Grant, in the sweet, indifferent voice that always made itself heard.

"She met a fairy prince at the ball last night. They are still to be met—at balls."

"You'd meet one anywhere he made a date, wouldn't you, Edith Kent?" said the Judge rudely. "Give Miss Judy a penny for her thoughts, if you want them, Everard. You've got to pay sometimes, you know—even you."

"Don't commercialize her too young," said Mr. Sebastian smoothly. "Though, on the whole—can you commercialize them too young?"

"Judith, what were you thinking about?" the Colonel interrupted, rather quickly, turning every one's eyes upon her at once, as he could with a word.

Judith met them confidently—amused, curious eyes, but all friendly and gay. They talked a great deal of nonsense here, but it did not irritate

her, as it did her friend Judge Saxon, though she was not always amused, and could not always understand. They never tried to shock her. She was sorry for the Judge. He was not at home with these gay and good-natured people, and it was so easy to be.

She tipped her head backward in deliberate imitation of Edith Kent, whom she admired, half closed her eyes, like Lillian Burr, whom she admired still more, gazed up at the Colonel, and said, in her clear little voice:

"I was thinking about you."

"That's the answer," said Mr. Kent, and rewarded it with a lump of sugar dipped in his apricot brandy.

"For an ingénue?" said Mrs. Burr, very sweetly indeed.

"'She's getting older every day,'" hummed Mrs. Kent, in her charming, throaty contralto.

But Judge Saxon pushed back his chair and rose abruptly.

"I've had dinner enough," he said, "and so have you, Miss Judy."

"We all have, Hugh," said the Colonel quickly, and rose, too, and slipped an intimate hand through his arm. "Run along, children! Hugh, about that Brady matter——"

Judge Saxon submitted sulkily, but was laugh-

ing companionably with the Colonel by the time they all reached the library.

Judith never admired the Colonel more than when he was managing Judge Saxon in a sulky mood. And she never admired the Colonel and his friends more than she did in the lazy intimate hour here before the cards began.

The room was long and high, and too narrow; unfriendly, as only a room that is both badly proportioned and unusually large can be, but you forgot this in the softening glow of candles and rose-shaded lights. You forgot, too, that you were an exile from your own generation, among elders who bored you, though you were subtly flattered to be among them. Safe on a high window-bench in the most remote window, entirely your own, since the architect had not designed it to be sat on, and nobody else took the trouble to climb up, it was so much pleasanter to watch these people than to talk to them; they had such pretty clothes, and wore them so well, and made such effective, changing pictures of themselves in the big room.

Sometimes they amused themselves with the parlour tricks that they had so many of, and sometimes they drifted in and out in groups of two and three, to more intimate parts of the house: the smoking-room, or Mrs. Everard's suite, if she was well, or out through the French windows,

across the broad, glassed-in veranda that ran the length of the room and darkened it unpleasantly by day, into the Colonel's rose garden. It was warm enough for that to-night, and a yellow, September moon showed invitingly through the windows. Mrs. Grant, who liked to be alone, as Judith could quite understand, since she had to listen to the Honourable Joe's big voice so much of the time, was slipping out through a window now, taking the coat that Mr. Sebastian brought her, but refusing to let him go with her.

He went to the piano, ran his thin, flexible brown fingers over the keys, struck into a Spanish serenade, and sang a verse of it in his brilliant but tricky tenor, with his languishing eyes upon Mrs. Burr.

"Ranny, do you want to tell the whole world of our love? You terrify me," she said, and took refuge on one arm of the Colonel's chair. Judith's mother, protesting that she needed a chaperon, promptly took possession of the other arm, disposing her blue, trailing skirts demurely, and looking more Madonna-like than ever through the cloudy smoke of a belated cigarette. The others made themselves equally comfortable, all but Judge Saxon, who had ceased to advertise the fact that he was not.

"Smile at me," Mrs. Kent begged, hovering

over his chair; "I'm going to sing by and by, and I need it. Do smile! If you don't, I'm going to kiss you, Judge."

"Go as far as you like, but be sure how far you like to go, Edith," said the Judge quietly. She flushed, and turned away abruptly, playing with a pile of songs.

"I'm looking for a lullaby. Our youngest seems to need it."

"Not in your line, are they?" said Sebastian, and began to improvise one, while Judith, in her corner, closed her eyes contentedly. Whether there was any truth or not in the report that he had been playing a ramshackle piano in an East Side restaurant in New York when the Colonel picked him up, Sebastian could do charming things with quite simple little tunes, if you did not inquire into problems of harmony and counterpoint too closely. He was doing them now, weaving odds and ends of familiar tunes, rather scapegrace and thin, into a lovely, reassuring whole, that made you feel rested and safe. Judith, making herself comfortable against a stiff and unwieldy Arts and Crafts sort of cushion, as long experience had taught her to, listened, smiling.

She had no idea what a unique position she was occupying there. Judge Saxon grumbled and scolded, but he was part of the group in the room.

He had grown into it, and belonged to them, as he might have belonged to an uncongenial family. The Colonel's distinguished guests saw them only on their best behaviour. Their local critics never penetrated here at all. Judith was the only outsider who did, and she had besides the irrevocable right of youth to pronounce judgment upon those who have prepared the world for it to occupy. She was their only licensed critic. What did she think of them? Her blond head drooped sleepily. She did not look disposed to say.

Sebastian played on, drifting into something sophisticated, with a suggestion of waltz rhythms running through it. There was a stir of movement in the room, and the sound of windows opening and shutting, once, and then again. Judith did not turn her head to see who had gone out. She was too comfortable. It was strange that he could make you so comfortable with his music, when he made you so uncomfortable if you talked to him, watching you so closely with his queer, bright eyes.

He stopped abruptly, with a big, crashing discord, and Judith rubbed her eyes and sat up. Mrs. Kent was going to sing now. She tossed some music to him.

"That's over your head," she said; "over all your heads; better put me up there, too, Cleve.

Besides, I want to dance. That table will do." She cleared it unceremoniously, with her husband's help, and established herself there, poised motionless, through the introductory bars of the song, her sleepy eyes wide awake now, and a red rose from a bowl on the table caught between her teeth.

Quietly, always careful to avoid the reputation of being shocked, like the Judge, Judith slipped down from her perch, and across the room, and out through the window.

> "Please keep my folks from kickin';
> Grab me while I'm a chicken,
> I'm getting older every day."

Mrs. Kent's fresh voice was urging, as Judith tiptoed across the veranda.

The rowdy words of her little songs and the demure plaintiveness of Mrs. Kent's voice made an effective contrast. It amused Judith as much as any one, and she liked to laugh, but she liked better to cry, and if you could not hear the words, Mrs. Kent's voice made you cry; big, luxurious tears, that stood in your eyes and did not fall. As she found her way across the lawn, among the elaborate flower-beds, the voice followed her, mellow and sweet. It had never sounded so sweet before. Everything sweet in the world was sweeter to-night.

At the edge of the lawn Judith paused. Ahead of her three marble steps, flanked by urns filled with ivy, glaring things in the daytime but glimmering shadowy white and alluring now, led up the terrace to the rose garden; a fairy place, far from the world, so hedged in and shadowed by trees that it was dark even by moonlight, entered through an old-fashioned trellised arbour, that was so mysterious and dark, she liked it almost as well now when the rambler roses were not in flower.

When she left the room her mother had been sitting in Colonel Everard's chair, she seemed to remember, and the Colonel and Mrs. Burr were nowhere to be seen. The whole room looked emptier, though she did not know who else was missing. But there were two people now in the rose arbour. She could just hear their voices, low, with long silences between.

She wanted the place to herself. She stood still, hoping that they would go. There was a path into the woods on the other side of the little garden: the Colonel's bare, semicultivated woods, combed clean of underbrush, but you did not miss it at night. The woods were full of adventure, but the garden was better to dream in, and Judith had a great deal to dream about.

The lighted house looked quite small and far

away across the wide, moonlit lawn. They had stopped singing, and the laughter that followed the song did not sound so clear as the music; you could just hear it. Presently you could hear nothing, and it was quiet in the rose arbour, too. She waited until she was sure, standing quite still at the edge of the dark enclosure, not a ruffle of her white dress fluttering, very slender and small against the dark of the leaves. Then she slipped into the arbour.

Through a fringe of drooping vine that half hid the picture, she could see the garden, empty and dimly moonlit, with the marble benches faintly white. She hurried through, pushed a trailing vine aside, then dropped it and shrank back under the trellis.

The garden was empty. But across it, just at the entrance of the wood path, she saw a man and a woman. At first she took the two figures for one, they were standing so closely embraced. She could not see their faces, only the two dark figures standing there like one. They stood still a long time. They might have been lovers in a picture, only you could not paint pictures of darkly clothed, ungraceful, shapeless people. Finally they moved, the man turning suddenly, slipping an arm higher around the woman's shoulders, and putting his face down to hers.

Then he drew her into the wood path, and they passed down it out of sight. Judith did not know who the woman was, but the man was Colonel Everard. And they had kissed each other.

Now they were gone. Judith drew a deep breath of relief and stepped out into the enclosure, pacing across it with slow steps, possessing it for her own and dismissing alien presences. There was a high-backed marble erection between the benches, which looked like a memorial to the dear departed, but was designed for a chair. She seated herself there deliberately, leaning back, at ease somehow in the unfriendly depths of it, a slender, uncompromising creature, like a young princess sitting in judgment on her throne.

They had kissed each other. She knew they did things like this, but now she had seen it, which was different, and not very pleasant. But they were all so old. Did it really matter whether they kissed each other or not?

"Stupid old things," said Colonel Everard's only authorized critic, "I don't care what they do."

Here in the quiet of the garden you were free to think about more interesting things than the Everards or even fairy princes.

"Stupid," repeated Judith absently, and forgot the Everards. The moon, far away but very clear,

shone down at her in an unwinking, concentrated way, as if it were shining into the Colonel's garden and nowhere else, and at nobody but Judith. She did not look disconcerted by the attention, but stared back at it with eyes that were not sleepy now, but very big and bright—wondering, but not afraid.

On still nights like this you could just hear the church clock strike from the garden, but you could not count all the strokes. Judith listened for the sound. It was early, and out here, in the cool, still air, it felt early, though the time had passed so slowly in the Colonel's sleepy rooms. She could hear no music from the house. They would soon begin to put out the bridge tables. There was always a chance that they would need her to complete a table, but if they did not, the Colonel's car was to take her home at nine.

And the Colonel's youngest guest had further plans for the evening.

CHAPTER SIX

"THAT will be all, Miss?"

"Yes," said Judith, with unnecessary emphasis. "Oh, yes, indeed!"

The Everards' car turned and flashed out of the drive and up the street. Judith stood still on the steps and watched it, if a young lady with her breath coming fast and her eyes shining bright in the dark, and her heart beating unaccountably hard can be said to be standing still. One light burned forlornly over the entrance of the inn. Light was Judge Saxon's one extravagance, and plenty of it was waiting for him in the house next door, though it would be two before any one left the Everards' but Judith.

The house before her was dark, and the dimly lighted street was profoundly still, with the heavy and brooding stillness that comes upon village streets after nine and is to be found nowhere else in the world. Judith did not seem depressed by it. Somewhere on a side street solitary footsteps echoed hollow through the silence, and she listened intently, but they came no nearer, and presently died away. She fumbled excitedly with

her key, threw open the door, and groped her way across the unlighted hall. She encountered the telephone table prematurely, clutched it, and laughed a high-keyed, strange little laugh.

"Who's there?" demanded a voice from the stairs, disconcertingly close. The lights, switched suddenly on, flashed into Judith's eyes, and Norah confronted her, peculiarly forbidding in a discarded cape of Judith's and her own beflowered best hat.

"Oh, it's you," she said.

"Who did you expect? Anybody else? Did—anybody come?"

"I expected you a half hour ago."

"What made you wait for me?"

"Didn't you want me to?"

"Nana, of course, but if your sister is sick and needs you——"

Norah listened to this irreproachable sentiment suspiciously. "It's late to go," she said.

"I'll walk up with you if you're frightened."

"You! Can you unhook that dress?"

"Yes. I'm going to bed pretty soon. I'm awfully sleepy."

"There's some ginger ale on the ice."

"I can get it open myself. Did anybody come?'

"A boy you know."

"Who?"

"You're too anxious to know, and too anxious to get rid of me. And you're acting nervous."

"I'm not. I'm just sleepy."

Norah, her grimmest self, as she always was just before relenting, began to fumble with her hat-pins.

"Let me help, if you really want to take off your hat. You'll spoil your beautiful roses. Darling, you look like your niece, the lovely Miss Maggie Brady, in that hat. Don't take it off. You're cross because you know where I've been. Well, they didn't eat me. I'm all here. It was Willard who came, and I don't care whether you tell me or not. And I don't want to get rid of you. And I love you and you love me, and you're not cross now."

"If I love you, you've got need of it, then." Norah struggled perfunctorily, and permitted herself to be kissed. "Alone here till all hours of the night, and Mollie at the dance at the Falls, and your own mother——"

"But you won't worry about me? And you'll go? And you'll go now, before it gets later, so you won't be frightened. You'll go this minute? And—oh, Nana——"

Norah, departing by the front door because the back one was secured by an elaborate system of locks of her own invention, and operated only by

herself, turned to give Judith a farewell glance of grim adoration.

"Nana, was it Willard that came?"

"Yes."

"And not—anybody else?"

"No."

Norah, winding herself tightly into the cape in a way that converted that traditionally graceful garment into a kind of armour, disappeared up the street. When she was out of sight, and not until then, Judith slammed the door shut, laughing her tense, excited laugh again.

Then, for a sleepy young woman, she began to display surprising activity. First she turned off all the lights in the hall but one, in an opalescent globe, over the front door, looked at the faintly lighted vestibule with a calculating eye, and turned that out also. She looked critically in at the library, close curtained for the night, and dimly lit by the embers of the wood fire, raked apart, but not dead. She pushed them together expertly, and added a stick, a little one, which would soon burn down to picturesque embers, like the rest. She pulled an armchair closer to the fire, pushed it away again, and dropped two cushions on the hearth with a discreet space between.

The remains of Willard's last half-dozen carnations and a box of the eighty-cent-a-pound candy

which only Mr. Edward Ward was extravagant enough to prefer to the generally popular fifty-cent Belle Isle, were conspicuous on the table, and Judith carried them into the next room, out of sight. Just then the telephone rang.

Judith started, dropped the candy, ran into the hall, and stood looking down at the small instrument resentfully, as if it were personally to blame because she could not see who was calling her without answering and committing herself. Once she picked it up doubtfully, but finally put it down, still ringing intermittently, and hurried into the kitchen. She put a second bottle of ginger ale on the ice, brought a hammered brass tray and two glasses from the butler's pantry, then substituted a less ostentatious bamboo tray, hesitated, and then put them all away again.

Now she went to her own room, turned on an unbecoming but searchingly clear toplight, and frowned at herself in the mirror, jerked out her hairpins, shook out her soft hair, and brushed and pulled at it with unsteady hands. In spite of them, the pale gold braids, rearranged, looked almost as well as before, if no better, and the heightened colour in her cheeks was charming. From a corner of her glove-case she produced the two cosmetics then in favour with the younger set in Green River, burnt matches, and a bit of

scarlet ribbon, which made an excellent substitute for rouge if you moistened it. The ribbon was an unhealthy red, and looked peculiarly so to-night. Judith dropped it impulsively into her waste-basket, but experimented with the matches.

She made both her delicately shaded eyebrows an even splotchy black, admired the result, then suddenly rubbed it off, turned away from the mirror without a backward glance, and ran down into the hall. The clock was just striking ten.

Judith paused for one breathless minute at the library door, pressing both hands against her heart, then she went into the firelit room and made the last and most important of her preparations. She switched on the lights, toplights and sidelights and reading-lamp, all of them, went to the middle one of the three front windows, crushed the curtains back, and raised both shades high to the top, so that the light in the room looked out at the street from this window from sill to ceiling. Judith slipped quickly out of range of the window, dropped down on one of the cushions by the fire, and waited.

She had fluttered through her little hurry of preparation excitedly, but now there was evidence of deeper excitement about the tense quiet of her, huddled on her cushion, small hands clasping silken knees, and brooding eyes on the fire. There

was a dignity about her, too, in spite of her childish pose and a drooping grace that was almost a woman's.

What she was waiting for was slow to come, but she did not seem disturbed by that. The hands of the clock above her seemed to move with the unbelievable quickness characteristic of clock hands when there is no other activity in the room, and she observed them calmly. Soon they pointed to the quarter hour, they passed it. She looked faintly worried then. The telephone rang again; she pressed her hands over her ears and shut her eyes tight, and did not answer. The stick on the fire burned low and she did not replace it. It parted and fell from the andirons with a dull noise that echoed loudly through the empty room. Judith started and jumped up, her eyes hard and bright, her hands tightly clenched.

She eyed the clock threateningly, as if it were personally responsible for whatever disappointment she might be feeling, and she were daring it not to strike. It struck half-past ten in spite of her. Judith's mouth trembled childishly, and tears started to her eyes. They did not fall. Footsteps sounded outside. They turned into the drive. Judith stood on tiptoe and peeped at herself in the mantel mirror—her flushed cheeks, tumbled hair, and sparkling eyes. The steps

crossed the porch, and she ran to the door and threw it open—the length of the chain, and no wider. She did not unbar the chain. On the threshold, with a substantial box of Belle Isle under his arm, stood Mr. Willard Nash.

Judith regarded Mr. Nash and his Belle Isle with disfavour.

"You can't come in," she said.

Mr. Nash, who had been stooping to flick some dust from his boots, straightened guiltily. "Why?"

"It's too late."

"I've got to see you."

"You do see me." A white dress, a face almost as white, and big, dark eyes were all he could see, but it seemed to be enough. He inserted a square-toed boot cautiously in the opening of the door.

"I want to see you *about* something."

"What?"

"A new comic song for the quartette. They won't let us do 'Amos Moss' at the Lyceum concert. That part about the red shirt is vulgar. The new one's close harmony. It will show off Murph's voice."

"It's too late now. Go home, Willard."

"But I brought you this."

"Go home and eat it," suggested Judith.

Willard turned scarlet, swung round, then

changed his mind and inserted his foot in the crack of the door again, this time with a purposeful air. He was to develop into the type of man to whom an unpropitious time and place are an irresistible temptation to demand a show-down. It is a type that goes far, though it is not essentially popular. Judith sighed, then resigned herself.

"Judy, I don't make you out."

"You don't have to."

"I do." Willard's voice was impressive, as even a fat boy's can be when he is in the grip of fate and conscious of it. "I do."

"I'm sorry, Willard, dear," murmured Judith, with disarming sweetness, but he was not to be turned from his purpose.

"Judy, are you going with me or not?"

"Going with you?"

"Don't be a snob. What else can I call it but going with me? I don't know any other way to say it."

"Then don't say it."

"You've got my class pin and I've got yours. I know there isn't anybody else. You let me call and take you places, but you won't let me——"

"What?"

Willard looked sheepishly down at his boots, then bravely up at Judith. "Put my arm round you at picnics. Kiss you good-night."

Judith cut short this catalogue crisply.

"Spoon?"

This word was forbidden in the upper circles of the Green River younger set, and Willard looked pained, but collected himself.

"We are the same as engaged," he insisted sturdily.

He had forced an issue at last, but Judith evaded it, laughing softly in the dark.

"Oh, are we?"

"Aren't we?"

"How do you know there isn't anybody else?"

"Well, you won't look at Ed, and Murph don't count." Willard made this pronouncement lightly, though the adamantine rules and impassable barriers of a whole social order were embodied in it. "Murph that you're so thick with, all of a sudden. He's a bully fellow, all right, next captain of the team, probably. Good thing he's broken into the crowd a little way. Too bad he's Irish. Murph don't count."

"No—no!" A sudden and poignant sweetness thrilled in Judith's voice. The tenor of the Green River High School quartette, not ordinarily sensitive to variations of tone in the voices of others, could not ignore it. The change had disturbed him vaguely. It seemed to call for some comment.

"Judy, you look great to-night. . . . I'd do anything for you."

"Then go home, Willard."

"You haven't answered my question."

"What question?"

"Don't tease."

"I honestly don't know."

"You don't hear one word I'm saying to you."

Judith laughed guiltily. "Then what makes you talk to me?"

"Judith—are we the same as engaged?"

Judith hesitated. "Kissing each other good-night—and all that—is silly. I don't want to. Only sometimes I want to, and then afterward I'm ashamed, and can't understand why. Willard, I don't want to grow up. I don't ever want to. I want things to stay just the way they are. They are—lovely. Oh, Willard——"

She stopped, with tears in her eyes. There had been a real appeal in his earnest young voice, and she had done her best to answer it, painfully thinking out loud, with her heart in her words, making him an authentic confidence. But the confidence was off the point, and he ignored it, pursuing his subject with the concentration which will keep his sex the stronger one, votes for women or no votes for women.

"Are you the same as engaged to me?"

"Will you go home if I say I am?"

"Are you?"

"There isn't any such thing as being the same as engaged."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

Willard, forgetting himself in the heat of debate, had withdrawn his foot from the door. Judith, narrowly on the watch for this moment, now seized it, shutting him and his Belle Isle outside, and slamming the door in his face. He had gained his point, and would not linger. She heard him ring the bell once or twice in perfunctory protest, then put down his candy on the steps.

"Good-night," he called cheerfully, through the flimsy barrier of the pseudo-Colonial door.

"Good-night, Willard—dear!"

Judith's voice was sweet, but indifferent, and her manner was indifferent, for a young lady who would have seemed, to a literal-minded person, to have materially affected her whole future life by this conversation. She did not watch Willard go. She turned and stood in the library door, smiling absently and humming a little snatch of a waltz tune. It was eleven now, but the hour had ceased to concern her, as if she had been watching the clock for Willard. Presently, as

if she really had, she tossed the cushions back on the couch, drew the shades over the window, turned off the lights, and disappeared upstairs. Muffled sounds of a methodical but unhurried preparation for bed drifted faintly down, one last ripple of song, and then it was silent there.

It was very still in the library. The stillness of the whole empty house and the moonless night outside seemed to centre there. The dying fire threw out little spurts of flame and made wavering shadows on the hearth as if Judith were still crouching there. The embers glowed as red as when she had been fire-gazing, but they did not show what it was she had seen in the fire. They kept her secrets as safely as she kept them herself; as youth must keep its secrets, inarticulate, dumb, because it sees into the heart of the world so deeply that if it were granted speech it would make the world too wise. What Judith had seen in the fire, what had really been in her heart when she talked to Willard in the groping and pitiful language of youth, the only language she had, the fire could not tell, and perhaps Judith did not know.

It was still, and the tiniest sounds were exaggerated: a board creaking at the head of the stairs, and creaking again, the stair-rail creaking, the ghost of a faint little sigh; tiny and intermittent

sounds, but the silence became a listening hush because of them: listening harder and harder. At last a sound broke it: the doorbell, rung three times, one long peal and two short.

It was rung faintly, but loud enough. There was a soft hurry of slippered feet down the stairs, and a slender figure, tall in straight-falling draperies, slipped cautiously down and across the hall to the door, stopped and stood leaning with one ear pressed against it, silent and motionless, hardly breathing. The faint signal was repeated. Judith did not move.

There was one more ring, a soft tapping, and then silence. Judith listened for a minute, then whistled softly, a clear little signal, one long and two short, like the signal ring. There was no answer. She pulled frantically at the chain, got it loose, and threw open the door.

A boy was standing on the steps, a stolid, unmoving figure, looming deceptively tall in the dark. He did not step forward or greet her. Judith put out a groping hand and caught at his shoulder.

"Is it you? Oh, I thought you had gone," she said. "I was watching for you upstairs."

"I am going. I can't come in so late."

"No, of course not."

"Then what made you watch for me?"

"I wanted to see if you came."

"Well, I did come, and now I'm going."

"You walked past the house five times."

"Eight." The boy laughed shortly, and Judith's soft laugh echoed his. "Oh, what's the use? I'm going."

"Don't you want to come in?"

"No."

"Then what made you walk past the house?"

"You know well enough."

"I want you to tell me. . . . You can come in just five minutes if you want to."

"I—you——"

Judith caught her trailing draperies tighter round her, conscious that they were under observation. "It's not a kimono, it's a negligee. And you've seen my hair in braids before, when I played basket-ball. But you needn't come in unless you want to."

"I don't."

"You're not very nice to me. Willard tried to break in. Rena's been trying to get me by 'phone, to stay all night with me. You're not nice to me at all."

His only reply was a kind of tortured groan, but she seemed content with it. Her voice grew compellingly sweet.

"I want to talk to you."

"Go on and talk."

She huddled her draperies closer. "I'm too cold."

"Go to bed then."

"I won't. If you don't come in I shall stand here till mother comes. I'll probably get pneumonia."

This threat evoked no reply.

"Neil," the name was said as only names are said that are new and dear—not often used yet, but often dreamed over, but there was still no answer.

"Neil, I'm awfully cold."

"I don't care."

"Oh, don't you?"

"You know I do. You know—— Oh, Judith, won't you please let me go? I don't want to come in, I tell you."

"But you're coming?"

"Yes."

Yielding abruptly, he stepped into the hall beside her. Judith, suddenly silent, concerned herself conscientiously with the chain.

"Don't stand there like that. I can't fasten this if you do," she said breathlessly.

"Why?"

"Go into the library, and don't light the lights, if you're afraid of pigtails."

"I'm not afraid of—anything."

"Well—I'm not." With a reckless laugh,

which made this comprehensive challenge to the world still more comprehensive, she followed him into the firelit room. Slender and straight in soft-falling white, her face flushed and sweet, framed between silvery gold braids, her eyes wide and challenging, she stood looking at him across the hearth.

He faced her awkwardly but bravely, tall in the shadowy room, his face very white, his dark eyes catching the last rays of light from the dying fire. The two did not move or speak till he gave a sudden, shaken laugh.

"You wanted to talk to me—talk." He smiled a quick flashing smile. Judith drew away from him and he followed. "Now you've got me here, can't you shake hands with me?"

"Neil, be careful."

"I'm doing the best I can," he said in a choked voice. "You shouldn't get me here. You shouldn't get me to a house by night that's not open to me by day."

"But it is. Only they'll never let me see you alone, and I like to. I like to talk to you. It makes me feel—comfortable. Isn't it comfortable here?" Judith paused, overcome by an unaccountable difficulty with her breathing, but mastered it. "Comfortable and cozy? Aren't you glad you came in?"

"Comfortable!" He laughed, came two steps nearer to her, and stopped stiffly. Judith, disposing her soft, silky draperies daintily, observed him in silence from a big chair which she had taken possession of rather abruptly, faintly smiling.

"Don't look at me like that," he commanded.

"Like what? Sit down—over there, Neil. Isn't it cozy? Willard's got a new song that——"

"Willard!"

"Don't be cross. We—haven't very much time."

"Judith, where is this getting us? We're not children. Won't you talk straight to me? You ought to leave me alone, or talk straight."

"Please don't be cross."

"Cross!" He came across the hearth and stood close before her, awkward no longer, but splendid with youth in the firelight, his dark eyes shining.

"You knew I'd come, no matter how hard I tried not to?"

"Yes," Judith breathed.

"And you meant to let me in?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you know, if I come, if you let me, I can't help—can't help——"

"What?"

"Oh, Judith!" He dropped on his knees beside

her and hid his face. Judith did not touch the dark head that she could see dimly in the shadowy room, outlined against her cloudy white, but she leaned closer to it, her lips parting softly, her eyes wide and strange.

"I don't want you to help it," she breathed.

"But where will it get us?" pleaded a muffled voice.

"I don't care." Her hand hovered over the dark hair, touching it with the wonderful, blended awkwardness and adroitness of first caresses.

He brushed the butterfly touch away and raised his head and looked long at her, slipping both arms round her waist and holding her tight.

"Will you always say that?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, Judith!" Her sweet, flushed face was close above him now, eyes drooping, lips faintly apart, drawn down to his as gently and inevitably as tired eyes close into sleep. "Judith, some day you'll have to care."

"Not yet. Neil, don't talk any more."

"I—can't."

"Then kiss me."

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CHAPTER SEVEN

IT WAS winter in Green River.

The town, attracting Colonel Everard to it sixteen years before, newly prosperous, outgrowing its old lumbering days, with the shipbuilding industry already a thing of the past, with the power in the little river awaiting development, money in the small but thriving bank, and a new spirit everywhere, beyond the control of old leaders, too progressive for a provincial magnate's direction, had been in the interesting and dangerous condition of a woman ready for her next love affair; if the right man comes, she may live happy ever after, but even if the wrong man comes, a flirtation is due. Like a woman again, the town showed the strength of his hold on her in his absence; in winter, when the big, unfriendly house was shuttered and closed, the ladies of the inner circle wore out their summer evening gowns at mild winter gayeties, church socials, Village Improvement Society bridge parties, and the old-fashioned supper parties which the Nashes and Larribees and Saxons still ventured to give.

Humble festivities which he would not have honoured with his presence lacked allurement because he was not in town and staying away from them. Great matters and small hung fire to await his deciding vote, from the list of books to be bought for the library to the chairmanship of the school board. Marking time and waiting for the Colonel to come home; that was what winter meant to most of Green River, but not to Judith Randall. Winter was a charmed time to her; the time when her mother did not care what she did. Freedom was always sweet, but this winter it was sweeter than ever before to Judith.

She was never lonely now. Whispering groups in the dingy corridor of the old schoolhouse, or in that sacred spot, the senior's corner, a cluster of seats in the northwest corner of the assembly-room devoted by tradition to secret conclaves, though not distinguishable from the rest of the seats in the room to uninitiated eyes, drew her in without question, slipping intimate arms round her waist.

Attempts at informal gatherings in the Randall drawing-room were failures, chilled by brief but devastating invasions of Mrs. Randall with a too polite manner and disapproving eyes. But wherever the crowd drifted after school hours, Judith drifted, too, or was summoned by telephone, by

imperative messages, vague, and of infinite possibilities:

"Judy, this is Ed. There'll be something doing to-night at our house. Bring your new dance records." Or, as the outer fringe of the younger set, jealously on the watch for snobbishness, but disarmed at last, claimed her diffidently but eagerly, new names at which her mother raised her eyebrows appeared on her dance orders: Joe Garland, whose father kept the fish market, and Abie Stern, Junior, the tailor's son. "Is this Judith Randall? Well, Judith, this is Joe; Joe Garland. I'm getting up a crowd to go skating to-night, and have a rarebit afterward. Would you care to come?"

She was one of the crowd. Natalie, little, sparkling-eyed, and black-haired, with the freshest and readiest of laughs, was more popular, filling her dance orders first and playing the lead in theatricals, and Rena Drew was more prominent, president of the class and the debating society, and the proud owner of the strongest voice in the school quartette, a fine big contralto which wrapped itself round Judith's small, clear soprano at public appearances and nearly extinguished it. Willard, the most eligible of the boys, was Judith's unquestioned property, otherwise nothing distinguished her. She was one of the crowd,

and accepted the fact demurely, as if it were a matter of course, not a dream come true. Just as discreetly she conducted her affair with Neil Donovan, captain-elect of the team, literary editor of the school paper, star debater, and in his way a creditable conquest, if she had cared to claim him openly.

"Neil danced three dances with me," confided Natalie, in the hushed whisper appropriate to the confidences that were part of the ceremony of spending the night together after a party, though Natalie's room, with the old-fashioned feather bed, where the two were cuddling together, was on the third story of the rambling white house, and safe out of hearing.

"Neil?"

"Judy, it's too bad to call him Murph and make fun of him. The day he came into the store to solicit ads for the *Record* father said that boy would go far, if he had half a chance, but no boy had a chance in this town, the way it is run, and no Irish boy ever did have a chance. Well, an Irish boy is just as good as anybody, if they only thought so."

"But they don't."

"Judy, you are horrid about Neil. You always are about any boy I get crushed on. Neil has perfectly beautiful eyes, and he is so sensi-

tive. He kept looking at you all through that last schottische as if you had hurt his feelings. He must have gone home soon after that. I didn't see him again. You didn't dance with him once."

"No."

"Poor boy. And he's up there in the schoolhouse with you, hour after hour, practising quartette stuff, and Willard so crazy about you he can't see, and Rena crazy about Willard——"

"Rena can have Willard."

Miss Ward was not to be diverted. "Neil's father did keep a saloon, but he died when Neil was a baby. His uncle that he lives with keeps a store at the Falls, and that's all right. His aunt took in washing, but his mother never did. Charles Brady does get drunk, but Maggie drives him to it. She's getting awfully wild. She's a perfect beauty, though, and I wish I had her hair. But Charlie's only Neil's second cousin. And Neil is so quiet and pleasant, not like that Brady boy that was in my sister Lutie's crowd; just as fascinating, but Neil doesn't take liberties."

"I'm getting sleepy, Nat."

"Judy, the way I feel about Neil, about Irish boys, is this: we can't go with them afterward, but while they're in school with us, they are just as good as we are, and we ought to give them just as

good a time as we can. If you know what I mean."

"I don't. I'm sleepy."

"I'm not. I shan't shut my eyes." But Miss Ward did shut them. "Judy."

"Well?"

"Judy, Abraham Lincoln split rails."

"Cheer up. The Warren Worth Comedy Company is going to play at the Hall next week, and Warren Worth has perfectly beautiful eyes, too."

"Not like Neil's."

"Go to sleep, Nat."

But Judith did not go to sleep until after an hour of staring wide-eyed into the dark, and she did not confide to Natalie or any one what had happened in the intermission after the schottische.

"You act restless," Willard complained to her then. "You hardly looked at me all through the encore."

"I'll look at you now, but get me some water first," she directed, and having disposed of him, slipped out alone into the dim and draughty corridor. Odd Fellows' Building, the centre of various business activities by day, looked deserted and forlorn at night, when the suites of offices were dark and closed, and the hall where they danced, gayly lighted and tenanted, was a little island of brightness in the surrounding dark.

"Neil," Judith called softly, "Neil, where are you? I saw you come out here. I know you're here." The corridor was empty, but several office doors opened on it, and on one of them she saw Charlie Brady's name. She knocked at it. "You're in there. I know you are. Let me in." She tried the door, found it unlocked, and opened it. The room was dark, faintly lighted by the street lamps outside the one uncurtained window, where he sat with his head in his hands, huddled in a discouraged heap over Charlie Brady's desk. Judith came and perched on it triumphantly.

"Running away?" she said.

"It's all I'm good for."

"Look at me."

"I thought you hadn't any dances free."

"I haven't. This is Willard's."

"Go back to Willard. . . . What did you come here for?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you?" He looked up now, with magic in his eyes and voice, the strange magic that came and went, and when it left him Judith could never believe it would come again. But it was here. With a little sigh she slipped off the desk and into the arms he held out for her, closing her eyes.

"I didn't want to dance with you," she whispered; "not with all those lights, and before those people."

"No, dear."

"I can't stay very long. They'd miss me."

"I'll let you go when you want to."

"I don't want to. I feel so comfortable—all sleepy, but so wide-awake. I never want to go."

Judith, remembering this moment until she carried it into her dreams with her, could not have shared it with Natalie. It was a dream already, to be wondered at and forgotten by daylight, as she stared across the schoolroom at Neil, not a romantic figure at all with his ill-fitting suit and his tumbled hair; forgotten until the next moment like it came—next in a lengthening series of dream pictures, of moonlight and candlelight and faintly heard music, a secret too sweet to share, a hidden treasure of dreams.

Certain pictures stood out clearest. In one, she was skating with Neil. Willard was giving a chowder party at the Hiawatha Club. This imposing name belonged to a rough one-room camp with a kitchen in a lean-to and a row of bunks in the loft above, and a giant chimney, with a crackling blaze of fire to combat the bleakness of the view through the uncurtained windows—

Mirror Lake. It was a failure as a mirror that day, veiled with snow, and the white birches fringing it showed bare and cold among the warm green of spruce and pine.

The camp was built and owned and the canoes and iceboats kept in repair in the boathouse, and the cook maintained and replaced when he left from loneliness, all by a syndicate with Judge Saxon as president. Forming it was one of the last independent social activities of the town before the Colonel took charge.

It was bad ice-boating to-day. The wind was fitful, and the boat, a graceful and winged thing in full flight, dragged heavily along, looking the clumsy makeshift box of unpainted boards that it was. It was a day to be towed along on your skates with one hand on the boat. Judith and Neil had tired of this and fallen behind.

Close together, but not taking hands, they swung slowly through the unpeopled emptiness, leaving a tiny scattering of tracks behind, the blue-white ice firm under their feet through a light film of snow. The ice-boat was out of sight, the sprightly and unexpurgated ballad of "Amos Moss," rendered in the closest of close harmony, could be heard no longer, and a heavy silence hung over the lake. The camp lay far behind them, a vanishing speck.

"Neil, take me back," Judith directed suddenly.

"Not yet."

"Please. I want some pop-corn. . . . Neil, I don't like you. You won't talk. You're queer to-day."

He did not answer. They cut through the ice in silence. It was rougher here. They were near the north end of the lake. There was open water there to-day, black water into which a boat might crash and go down; it made the water under them seem nearer to Judith, black water with only the floor of ice between. She shivered, and Neil broke the silence abruptly, his eyes still straight ahead.

"Judith."

"Oh, you can talk then?"

"Judith—do you love me?"

"Don't be silly." Judith spoke sharply. Days at the camp were always a trial to her. The crowd, bunched together in a big hay-rack mounted on runners, started out noisy and gay, like a party of children, singing, groping for apples in the straw, and playing children's games. But at night, slipping home under the moon to a tinkle of sleigh-bells, covered with rugs two by two, a change would take place: arms would slip around waists that yielded after perfunctory protest; in the dark of the woods there would be significant whis-

pering and more significant silences; Willard would be unmanageable. Judith saw this with alien eyes because of Neil, and dreaded it. This that was between them was so much more beautiful, not love-making, not real love, only a strange, white dream.

"You don't, then? You don't love me?"

"We're too young."

He did not argue the point. His silence had made her lonely before, now it frightened her. She slipped a hand into his, warm through its clumsy glove.

"Cross hands. Don't you want to?"

"No."

"But I want to. I'm tired. How limp your hand feels. Hold my hands tighter. Neil——"

"What?"

"You don't mind—what I said just now?"

"What did you say?"

"That about not loving you."

"That?" He laughed a bitter, lonely sort of laugh, as if she were talking about something that happened a long time ago. "You had to say it. It's true. I knew it well enough. I just thought I'd ask you."

"Do you want me to very much—want me to love you?"

"Don't talk any more about it."

"Neil, suppose I should marry Willard?"

"I suppose you will."

"You won't mind too much?"

"What call would I have to mind? Who am I? What am I?"

He laughed again, the same hard and bitter laugh, and struck out faster, gripping her hands hard, so that it hurt, but looking away from her across the dead, even white of the trackless snow. There was a pain not to be comforted or reached in his beautiful eyes. It had nothing to do with her.

"Neil, wouldn't you care at all?" she said jealously.

"Care?"

"If I married Willard?"

"Oh, yes."

"Neil, do you love me?"

He did not answer or seem to hear, and now Judith gave up asking questions. Carried along at his side in silence, she listened to the muffled creak of the skates on the snow-covered ice, hushed by the steady and sleepy sound of it, half closing her eyes. His left arm was behind her shoulders now, to support her, and she could feel it there, warm and strong. Breathing when he breathed, her heart beating in time with his, swinging far to right and left, tense with the stroke

or yielding deliciously in the recovery, caught in the rhythm of it as if some force outside them both were carrying them on like one, and not two, and would never let them go, Judith yet felt far away from him.

She was alone in the heart of a snow-covered world, but she was growing content to be alone. She looked up at his white, set face with wide and fearless eyes, while the lure of unexplored and unseen ice invited them all around, and the gray and brooding sky shut them in closer and closer.

"Neil," she said softly, not caring now whether he answered or heard, "I wish we needn't ever go back. I love to-day."

Not long after this Judith and Neil went snow-shoeing one Saturday afternoon by special appointment, an epoch-making event for them. Judith did not often walk with him or take him driving when the sleigh was entrusted to her. She was not often seen with him. With quartette practice and committee work for the dramatic club and other official pretexts for the time they spent together, Willard was not jealous yet, though the winter was almost over, and the treasury of dreams was filling fast.

But this time she made an engagement with Neil as openly as if he were Willard, while Natalie

listened jealously. She started with him openly from the front door, with her mother's disapproving eyes upon them from the library window, and Neil proudly carrying her snowshoes, all unconscious of the critical eyes. The afternoon began well, but no afternoon with Neil could be counted upon to go as it began. Two hours later, when they emerged from the Everard woods into the Colonel's snow-covered rose garden, they had quarrelled about half a dozen unrelated subjects, all equally unimportant in themselves, but suddenly important to Neil, who now found further matter for debate.

"What did you bring me in here for?"

"Didn't you know I was?"

"How should I know? I'm no friend of Everard's. I don't know my way through his grounds."

"What makes you call him Everard, without any Colonel or Mr.? It sounds so—common."

"It's good enough for me. Here, I don't want to go near his house. I hate the sight of it."

"But you can't go back by the path. It's too broken up." Judith plunged into the dismantled rose arbour. "Come on, if you don't want to see the house, take my hand and shut your eyes."

"That's what Green River does," Neil muttered darkly, "shuts its eyes." But he followed her.

"The Red Etin's castle," Judith announced; "you know, in the fairy tale:

"The Red Etin of Ireland,
He lived in Ballygan.
He stole King Malcolm's daughter,
The pride of fair Scotlan'.
'Tis said there's one predestinate
To be his mortal foe——

Well, you talk as if the Colonel were the Red Etin, poor dear. Oh, Neil, look!"

Sinister enough, looming turreted and tall against a background of winter woods, its windows, unshuttered still, since the last of the Colonel's week-end parties, and curtainless, catching the slanting rays of the afternoon sun and glaring malignantly, the house confronted them across the drifted lawn.

In the woods that circled the house, denuded of undergrowth, seeming always to be edging forlornly closer to the upstanding edifice for comfort because it was barren and unfriendly, too, the new-fallen snow lay shadowy and soft, clothing the barrenness with grace. Giant pine and spruce that had survived his invasion stood up proud and green under the crown of snow that lay lightly upon them, as it had lain long ago, before the Colonel came. And between woods and house,

erasing all trace of tortuous landscape gardening, flower-bed and border and path, as if it had never been, lay a splendid, softly shining sweep of blue-white snow. The Colonel's unbidden guests forgot their quarrel and plunged eagerly across the white expanse.

"Catch me," Judith called, but it was Neil, snatching off her toboggan cap by its impudent tassel, who had to be caught. It was heavy and breath-taking work on the broad, old-fashioned snowshoes which she managed with clumsy grace. Judith, short-skirted and trim in fleecy white sweater, collar rolled high to the tips of small, pink ears, blond curls blowing in the wind, pursued ardently. Neil evaded her like a lean and darting shadow, hands deep in the pockets of his old gray sweater, cap low over his brooding eyes.

Under the unrelenting glare of the Colonel's windows, and across the deserted grandeur of his lawn, the two small and dishevelled figures dodged and doubled and retreated, only to grapple and trip each other up at last at the foot of the veranda steps, and collapse there, breathless and laughing. But their laughter died quickly, and Judith, pulling the recovered cap over her wind-tossed curls, watched the brooding gloom come back into Neil's eyes as he settled into a sulky heap on the step below her.

Her quarrels with Neil were as strange as her beautiful hours with him, fed by black undercurrents of feeling that swept and surprised her, flaming up suddenly like banked fires. She was hotly angry with him now.

"Neil, I heard what you said about Green River shutting its eyes. It was foolish."

"I'd say it to his face." Neil flashed a black look at the bland and elegant drawing-room windows, as if he could talk to the Colonel through them. "I've got worse than that to say to Everard."

"Then say it to me. Don't hint. I'm tired of hearing you. You're as bad as Norah."

"You wouldn't understand."

That is the irresistible challenge to any woman. Judith's eyes kindled. Neil slouched lower on the steps, dropping his head in his hands. "Everard," he threw out presently, "has bought the Hiawatha Club Camp."

"I don't believe it."

"The club was in debt. That's a bad thing for a club or a man to be, if the Colonel knows it. And it's a worse thing for a woman."

"What do you mean?"

He did not explain or raise his head. "I've got a job for the summer vacation," he said presently.

"Already? Fine."

"Oh, fine. In the fish market—tend store, drive the cart. And I'm fired from the *Record*, Judith."

"Fired?"

"They're going to take on one more man, and pay him real money."

"But you've got the Green River Jottings to do for the Wells *Clarion*."

"And I may get two dollars a month out of it."

"Did you see Judge Saxon again?"

"Last week."

"Why didn't you tell me what he said?"

"I told you what he would say."

"Oh, Neil!"

"The Judge hates to say no, that's why he took time to think it over. He'd be a bigger man if he didn't hate to say no. He was right to say no to me."

"Then I wouldn't admit it."

"What's it worth to read law in a country law office? The time for that's past. He's right. And suppose he took me on, what would it do for me? Look at Charlie. Doing hack work and dirty work to pay the rent of a place to drink himself to death in. He's got brains enough. He knows law enough. He's slaved and starved and got ready for his chance, and his chance don't

come. Why? Because he's Charlie Brady. Well I'm Neil Donovan. I'm Irish, too, what they called me the first time I saw you—a paddy."

"That's not the Colonel's fault."

"Who do you think gets the *Record* job?"

Judith shook her blond head, disdaining to answer, a gathering storm in her eyes.

"Chet Gaynor—Mr. J. Chester Gaynor. Lil Burr's brother. Her prize brother, the one that's been fired from three prep schools. Everard got him a scholarship at the last one."

"Why not? He ought to help his friends. He's a kind man and lots of fun. It's not his fault if you don't get on. It's your own fault. You don't have to work in a fish market if you don't want to, or sit there and sneer at a man who doesn't care what you think of him. Abraham Lincoln split rails——"

Judith stopped, amazed. Quite abruptly Neil had ceased to sit on the steps and sneer. He was on his feet, hands clenched, thin body tense and dangerous, face dead white and eyes blazing, as Judith had never seen him before, or only once before, too angry for words, but not needing them.

"Neil, do you really hate him? Hate him like that? I never thought you meant it. But why—what has he done?"

"Care what I think? If I was any one else—

your fool of a Willard—any one in this town but me, I'd make him care."

"He's done nothing wrong. Neil, don't. Your eyes look all queer. You're frightening me."

"No, he's done nothing wrong, nothing you could get him for. He's too careful. He plays favourites. He fools women. He locks the door to every chance to get on in this town and he sells the keys. He's got his hand on the neck of the town, and he's shutting it tighter and tighter. That's all he does. That's all Everard does."

"You can't prove it."

"He takes good care I can't."

"You can't prove a word of it."

"Your father could."

"He's kind to father. He's kind to me."

"You talk like a child."

"Well, you talk like my mother's cook. . . . Oh, Neil, I didn't mean to say that. Forgive me. Where are you going? I didn't mean to say it."

"Let me go."

"You're hurting me."

"I hate you! You're one of them—one of the Everard crowd. I hate you, too!"

"What are you going to do?" Her short, panting struggle with him over, her wrists smarting from the backward twist that had broken her hold on him, she leaned against the veranda rail breath-

less and stared with fascinated eyes. When this quarrel had gone the way of their other quarrels, atoned for by inarticulate words of infinite meaning, justified by the keen delight of reconciling kisses, Judith was to keep one picture from it: Neil as she saw him then, standing over her white-faced and angry, ragged and splendid, Neil as she had seen him once before.

"May-night!" she cried. "You look the way you did that May-night. I'm afraid of you."

"Everard!" He turned from her, and looking at the windows again as if the Colonel were behind him, swung back his arm, and sent it crashing through the glass of the nearest one—once and a second time. "Oh, you don't want me to call him Everard. Colonel Everard!"

"Neil, I'm afraid."

He looked at the fragments of broken glass and at Judith scornfully, but the angry light was fading out of his eyes already, the magic light; against her will she was sorry to see it go.

"Are you hurt? Did you hurt your hand?"

"What do you care if I did? Don't be afraid, Judy. He can pay for a pane of glass or two. He wouldn't care if I burned his house down. Nobody cares what I do. I'm a paddy."

Awkward, suddenly conscious of his snowshoes, he shuffled across the matched boards of the Colo-

nel's veranda and down the steps, turning there for a farewell word:

"I'm going. Don't cry. I'm not worth it. I'm a paddy, from Paddy Lane."

Dream pictures, pleasant or sad, making her cheeks burn in the dark, or little secret smiles come when Judith recalled them. Some lived in her heart and some faded. Judith did not choose or reject them deliberately. They chose or rejected themselves, arranging themselves into an intricate pattern of growing clearness. She did not watch it grow. It was only when it was quite complete that she would see it, but it was growing fast.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"YOU'LL find the coffee pot on the back of the stove. I'm washing out a few things," said Mrs. Donovan.

Though she kept her five little nephews and nieces in dark-patterned dresses or shirts, as the case might be, and encouraged her brother Michael to wear flannel shirts, and even limited her eldest niece, Maggie Brady, clerking in the Green River Dry Goods Emporium now, instead of helping her father in his little store at the Falls, to three white waists a week, she was usually washing out a few things.

The contending odours of damp clothes and rank coffee were as much a part of the Brady kitchen as the dishes stacked in the sink for Neil to wash, or the broken-legged, beautifully grained mahogany card table in the warm corner near the stove, where his school books were piled, a relic of his dead father's prosperous saloon-keeping days, or the view of Larribee's Marsh through the curtainless windows with their torn green shades.

The swampy field was the most improvident part of an improvident purchase—a brown, tum-

bledown house, wind swept and cold, inconveniently far from the settlement at the Falls and the larger town, heavily mortgaged, and not paid for yet, but early on sunny spring mornings like this the field was beautiful; level and empty and green, the only monotonous thing in that restless stretch of New England country, billowy with little hills, and rugged with clumps of trees. A boy could people the sunlit emptiness of the field with airy creatures of folk-lore, eagerly gleaned in a busy mother's rare story-telling moments, or with Cæsar's cohorts marching across it, splendid in the sun, if he had eyes for them. The only boy who ever had regarded the familiar, glinting green of the field with unkindled eyes to-day as he sat finishing his lukewarm breakfast. Yet it was Saturday morning, that magic time, the last Saturday of his last spring vacation, and he had only one more term of school before him.

On this Saturday morning he had an unpleasant errand to do, and he was carefully dressed for it, just as he had been dressed for the Lyceum declamation contest and ball the night before, but not so effectively, for his best black suit showed threadbare in the morning sun, and the shine on his shoes was painstakingly applied, and a heavy, even, blue black, but they needed tapping. His brown eyes had a big, rather hungry

look that was unquestionably picturesque, and Miss Natalie Ward would have approved of it, if his mother did not, watching him as she trailed in and out of the room.

"Making out all right? Don't hurry," she said.

"I'm in no hurry to get there," agreed her son.

"He won't say no to you. He never has yet, and he likes you."

"Oh, he won't say no. Nothing new will happen to me in this town; not even that."

Neil's mother paused, balancing her clothes basket against one hip, and deftly favouring the string-mended handle, then put it heavily down, and leaned on the table and looked at him—a small, tired, pretty woman, with gray, far-away eyes that were like no other eyes in Green River, and a smile like Neil's.

"Tired?" she said.

"Dog tired."

"Well, you were out till three."

"One. That was Maggie you heard at three. Where was she?"

"That's her business."

"It's Charlie's, if he's going to marry her."

"It's not yours, then. Never mind Maggie. Your uncle and I had a talk about you last night."

"Why don't you ask to see my dance order?"

He made a defensive clutch at his pocket as if she had, and quick colour swept into his cheeks. She watched it, and watched it fade, leaving his face tired and sullen, and too old for its years. "Uncle!"

"He's been like a father to you."

"I've been two sons to him, then. He's worked me like two. If he grudges the time I take off, I can make it up to him. There's been little enough of it, and there'll be little more, and there's been little enough enjoyment in it, and I'm not ashamed of it. Why don't he spy on his own daughter, if he's curious? Why——" This outburst ended as suddenly as it began, in a short, sullen laugh as he pushed his empty cup away. "Dan thinks he can land something for me with the telephone company. I couldn't send money home at first, but I'd be off your hands. Tell that to Uncle."

"Would you be with Dan, in Wells?"

"Somewhere outside Wells. It won't be too gay. You needn't be afraid I'll go to too many dances."

"Don't glare at me. I'm not your uncle."

"Sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Don't you?"

He flushed, laughed, and ignored the question, producing a small box and offering it. "I got that last night. Don't wipe your hands. They're good enough to handle it wet." A gold medal

glittered in her hand. He observed it without enthusiasm, and noticing that, his mother shut the box abruptly.

"Neil, that's the first prize."

"Looks like it. I spoke the Gettysburg address, and they always fall for that. Good-bye, I'm off."

"Neil, come back here."

He swung round with his cap doubled under his arm, and stood before her, helpless and sullen, hedged about with that sudden dignity which no woman creature can break through, but seeming to derive no comfort from it. Painful colour mounted to her cheeks, as if the effort of keeping him there was all she could manage without the effort of opening delicate subjects.

"Neil, I'm worried about you."

"Why? Are you afraid I'll marry beneath me? I won't marry without your consent. It's not being done."

"You got three dollars from the *Clarion* last week."

"Are you afraid I'll try to support a wife on it?"

"It's the most you've made from them. Why weren't you proud of it? Why aren't you proud of this prize? A year ago you'd have had me up at one to speak your piece to me. There's no life in you, and no pride, and I know why."

"Me with so much to be proud of."

"You're good enough for any girl, but——"

"Do you think I don't know my place, with the whole town teaching it to me going on eighteen years? I've got no false hopes, and I shan't lose my head over any girl. Let me be."

"It's not the town that's taught you your place, it's——"

"Don't you say her name."

"—empty headed and overdressed."

"Go on. Judith Randall don't care what you think of her."

"Can't you even get up enough spirit to stand up for her? You that thought you had your fortune all but made when you got the chickens paid for, and followed me round the house, telling me how you'd run the town? You that could tell what was wrong with the *Record* editorials, if you couldn't pay for a year's subscription to the paper? You——"

"Yes, I come from one of the five lines in Ireland what have a right to the O', but you never tell me that unless you've got something else to tell me that you're afraid to tell. What is it this time?"

"You come of Irish kings."

"What did Uncle say last night?"

"Well, he's getting to be an old man."

"What did he say?"

His mother did not reply. She avoided his eyes, and made no further criticism of him, or of a young lady who was no doubt as indifferent to her criticisms as Neil said, since she did not recognize Mrs. Donovan on the street.

"Uncle," Neil decided deliberately, "wants me to help in the store. I can't go to Wells."

"He can't get on alone now Maggie's gone. We need your board money to run the house at all. Dan was wild to get away from Green River, but in two years he's got no farther than Wells, and ten dollars a week. I know we ought to leave you free to start yourself, if we can't give you a start, but——"

"Is that all you want to tell me?"

She put out an unaccustomed arm and pulled him awkwardly close. He came obediently, and patted her shoulder stiffly but did not kiss her. "I know what this means," she asserted, and showed a rapidly forming intention of crying on his shoulder. "It hurts me like it does you."

"It don't hurt me. I ought to have seen it myself. I ought not to have planned to go. It's all right, mother. Is that all?"

"All? It's enough. I was awake half the night planning to break it to you."

"You broke it all right. I'll be going." He

shook out his crushed cap, and adjusted it with dignity, looking at her calmly out of impenetrable eyes, like a young prince ending an audience, with more power behind him than he knew, kissed her gravely on the cheek with cool young lips, and opened the door, and walked off into the sunshine.

"It's the girl," said his mother, but not until the door had closed behind him. "No girl is good enough to do what she's done to you." Then she selected the frilliest of Maggie's blouses, which had dried while she talked, and spread it on the ironing table to sprinkle again.

Neil did not look like a young man crossed in love, or a young man with his future wrecked by a word. He did not give a backward glance to the little brown house with the sun on its many-paned windows, or seem to hear the children's voices from the old barn behind the house—the favourite refuge of the little Bradys when they were banished from the kitchen—that echoed after him in the clear morning air, shrill and then fainter as he left the place behind.

He had settled into his usual pace for this familiar walk—a steady stride that you could fit the unmanageable parts of a Latin verb to the rhythm of, or the refractory words of a song; but it was not a usual day. It was the first warm day of that

April, warmer already, with the goading urge of spring in the softening air that frets and troubles with new desires and a sense of unfitness for them at once, and will not let you be. The road, fringed with scattering trees, and wind-swept and bleak on winter days, was golden with new sunlight, spongy underfoot, but drying under your eyes in the morning sun. The boy's brooding face did not change as he walked, but his shoulders straightened themselves, and lost their patient look, and his lean young body gave itself more gayly to the swing of his pace and looked strong and free, alive with the unconscious strength of youth that must be caught and harnessed to make the wheels of the world go round before it can be taught what its purpose is.

Whether it troubled him or not—his face did not tell—all that his mother had hinted was wrong with his world, and more. No outsider had ever won a place like Neil's in Green River High School society so far as the unwritten history of it recorded. Charlie Brady in his time, and Dan after him, had been extra men at big dances, hard worked and patronized in school entertainments, more intimate with the boys than the girls. Charlie, deep in a secret love affair with Lil Gaynor, had still called her Miss in public, and treated her as respectfully as he did now that

the affair was forgotten and she was Mrs. Burr and one of the Everard circle. Charlie and Dan had only looked over impassable barriers. Neil had been really inside—included in small, intimate parties, like week-ends at Camp Hiawatha, openly favoured by Natalie, if not Judith—inside and he would soon be shut out.

There were new signs of it every day. The long, friendly winter, when he had been safe in that intimate fellowship, was over. The girls were planning their gowns for college commencement dances. Willard came back from a week-end at the state university pledged to a fraternity there and refusing to discuss minor subjects. God-like creatures in amazing neckties condescended to visit him, and Natalie was beginning to collect fraternity pins. Rena and Ed were engaged, and under the impression that it was a secret, and a place was being made for Ed in the bank. In one way or another, the world was opening to all of them, and closing to Neil.

And with the spring, the Everards had come back to Green River. The big, over-decorated house had not been open a week, but already they pervaded the town. Their cars whirled through the splashing spring streets, and ladies not upon Mrs. Everard's calling list peered at the passengers to see who was in her favour. The Colonel

was turning the Hiawatha Club into a private camp, and closing it to the town, but nobody protested much. He was ordering a complete set of slip covers from the furniture department of Ward's Emporium, and the daring group of prominent business men who ventured to assail the Colonel's political views and private morals sometimes in the little room at the rear of the store lacked support from Ward. Neil had the run of the store and hung about and listened, but never contributed. Whether these criticisms were justified or not, the Everards were back again.

Judith had given up the Lyceum dance for the first of the Everard dinners the night before. It was three days since Neil had seen her, and he was to see her to-day, but he was showing no impatience for the meeting. The end of the world, not the beginning of it, that was what spring would mean to him, and that is a graver catastrophe at eighteen than at eighty. The boy who was facing it had passed the outlying straggle of houses, and had come to the edge of the town, and to the end of the long, hilly street that led down past the court-house, straight into Post Office Square, the heart of the town. It was still empty of traffic at ten, and looked sunny and empty and clean, wide-awake for the day. He took his hands out of his pockets, stopped whistling "Amos Moss,"

and hurried down Court-house Hill, stepping in time to the tune of it.

A mud-splashed Ford clattered down Main Street, and drew up in front of the post-office as Neil reached it with a flourish that would have done credit to a more elegant equipage than this second-hand one of the Nashes. Two elegant young gentlemen, weck-end guests of Willard's and duly presented to Neil the night before, ignored his existence, perusing a gaudily covered series of topical songs with exaggerated attention on the rear seat of the car, but Willard greeted him exuberantly:

"Ah, there, Murph. You don't look like the morning after. Sorry I haven't got room for you. We've got other plans. We love the ladies."

"I'm tied up, anyway. So long."

Willard's tone was too patronizing, but he was not to blame, for the days when they would exchange intimate greetings at all were numbered. As Neil left them one of the elegant guests demanded audibly:

"Who's your friend?"

Neil flushed but did not look back. He had an errand to do in the few minutes before his appointment with Judge Saxon. He crossed the street to Ward's store.

Ward's Dry Goods Emporium, three stores in one, and literally three stores bought out one by one, and joined by connecting doors, though they could never be united in their style of architecture, was rather dark and chaotic inside, though a brave showing of plate glass across the front advertised its prosperity. Luther Ward himself, in his shirt sleeves, was looking over a tray of soiled, pale-coloured spats, assisted by a tall, full-bodied girl with a sweet, sulky mouth, and a towering mass of blue-black hair.

"Hello, Donovan, what's new?" he said, with only a shade more condescension than Willard, and distinctly more friendliness.

"Nothing, sir," said Neil with conviction.

"You want to talk to Maggie, here. I won't intrude on a family quarrel," said Mr. Ward, and chuckling heartily at his own mild joke, as he generally did, and few others did, disappeared into the furniture department, the central one of the three stores, and his favourite. The two cousins regarded each other across the tray of spats as if the family quarrel were not a joke, but an unpleasant reality.

"You can't come here and take up my time," stated Miss Brady.

"Your time is pretty full—evenings, too. Do you know where Charlie was last night?"

"I don't care."

"You ought. He's your second cousin, and goes by the same name as you, if you're not in love with him. He was in Halloran's billiard hall."

"If he can't keep himself out of the gutter, I can't keep him out," stated Miss Brady logically.

"Well, don't push him in," her cousin advised, but the light of battle had died out of his eyes, leaving them listless. "It's nothing to me. I only came to bring you this."

He produced something from an inner pocket and tossed it on the counter, something wrapped in a twist of newspaper, which parted as the girl bent eagerly over it, something which shone and twinkled alluringly, as she straightened it out with caressing fingers and held it up to the light—a little necklace of rather ornate design and startling colours, crimson stones and green and blue, the gayest of toys.

"Seems to be yours all right."

His cousin, who seemed to have forgotten his existence for one rapt moment, remembered it with a start. "Did you show this to your mother?" she asked sharply.

"Why?"

"Well, she don't like to have me spend my money on imitation jewellery." Miss Brady delivered this very natural explanation haltingly.

"Do you?"

One of the sudden, vivid blushes which had helped to establish her reputation as a beauty overspread Miss Brady's cheek. "I missed it this morning and didn't have time to hunt for it, and I was worried. I don't want to show it to her. It cost a good deal."

"It must have. They say a ruby's the only stone you can't imitate."

"What do you mean?" Miss Brady's cheeks grew still redder. "Why don't you save your big talk for Saxon? You may need it. Why don't you mind your own affairs, and leave mine alone?"

"Leave that on the kitchen floor for mother to find and sweep up in a broken dust-pan, or one of the kids to show to your father?"

"Why not? Haven't I got a right to do what I want with my own money? Haven't I got a right to do what I want with myself? Who are you to dictate to me, with the Randall girl making a fool of you? Why——"

"That will be all." Though Miss Brady's voice had been threatening to make itself heard throughout all the three stores in one, she stopped obediently, looking defiant but frightened, but when her cousin spoke again the ring of authority which had shocked her was gone from his voice.

"Don't be scared. It's nothing to me what you

do, and I shan't talk too much. You know me, Mag."

"No, I don't, not lately. You act doped, not half there. I can't make you out. If you think —if you suspect——"

"I don't. It's nothing to me. I'm due at Saxon's. Put your glass beads away before Ward sees them. Good luck to you."

Miss Brady, standing quite still in one of her carefully cultivated, statuesque poses, watched her cousin cross the street and disappear into a narrow and shabbily painted doorway there. Then she took his advice, and producing a red morocco wrist bag from under the counter, shut the necklace into it with a vicious snap, as if she did not derive so much pleasure as before from handling it now.

Her cousin climbed the three flights of stairs to Judge Saxon's office. The stairs were dingy and looked unswept, and a pane of glass in the door of the untenanted suite across the landing from the Judge's was broken. Nothing about the Judge's quarters indicated that he was Colonel Everard's attorney, a big man in the town before the Everard régime and under it—an unusual combination. His office was shabby outside and in. The lettering on the door, Saxon and Burr, Attorneys-at-Law, looked newer than it was by contrast, and it

was still only six months old. Theodore Burr had his delayed junior partnership at last.

The Judge's young client did not pause to collect himself on the worn door-mat, as he had done when he first came here on errands like this. They were an old story to him now, and so were scenes like the one with Maggie, which he had just come through so creditably. He looked quite unruffled by it, calm as people are when they have no troubles to bear—or when they have borne all they can, and are about to find relief in establishing the fact. He knocked and stepped inside.

CHAPTER NINE

A FIRE in the air-tight stove in the corner had taken the early morning chill from the room and been permitted to burn out, now that the morning sun came in warm through the dusty windows, but the room was still close and cloudy with wood smoke. At a battered, roll-topped desk in the sunniest window Mr. Theodore Burr was struggling with the eccentricities of an ancient Remington, and looking superior to it and to all his surroundings, but the Judge was nowhere to be seen.

Mr. Burr was a very large, very pink young man, with blond hair which would have looked too good to be true on a woman, and near-set, green-blue eyes which managed to look vacant and aggressive at the same time. He was wearing a turquoise-blue tie which accentuated their effectiveness, and he occupied himself ostentatiously with the Remington for quite three minutes before he turned his most vacant and aggressive look upon his client.

"Well, Donovan?" he said.

Mr. Burr's manner was as patronizing as Mr.

Ward's with the friendliness left out, but his client was not chilled by it.

"Theodore, where's the Judge?" he asked.

"Mr. Burr." The pink young man turned two shades pinker as he made the correction. "The Judge is engaged."

"I don't believe it."

Mr. Burr laughed unpleasantly and held up his hand. From the other side of a door labelled private—misleadingly, for the Judge's little sanctum, where half the town had the privilege of crowding in and tipping back chairs and smoking, was the nearest approach to a clubroom that the town afforded, now that the Hiawatha Club was no more—muffled voices were faintly audible.

"You can talk to me," said Mr. Burr.

"I can, and I can go away and come back when he's not engaged. He said he'd see me."

"He's changed his mind. He don't want to see you. I know all about your case."

"You've learned a lot in six months."

"Talk like that won't get you anything, Donovan, here or anywhere else," remarked Mr. Burr, reasonably, if somewhat offensively. Admitting it, his client dropped into one of the Judge's big office chairs, and sat there, fingering his cap as he talked, and looking suddenly beaten and tired.

"You're right, Theodore. Well, what's all this you know about my case?"

"Mike Brady sends you here begging when he's ashamed to come himself. It's hard on you, Neil."

"My uncle's too busy to come. Is that all you know?"

"I know what you want to-day, and you can't have it."

"What do I want?"

Mr. Burr's manner had become alarmingly official, but his client continued to smile at him, and to fold and unfold his cap methodically.

"An extension of time on your uncle's mortgage. The principal is due the first of next month. You've kept the Judge waiting twice for the interest, the security is insufficient, the bank holds a first mortgage on the house, and for fourteen months your uncle has made no payment to the Judge whatever."

"Don't rub it in, Theodore."

"This is no laughing matter. Business is business," stated the junior partner importantly.

"More like charity, with the Judge, but Uncle isn't holding him up for much this time. Uncle's getting on his feet. The Judge never expected him to, and I didn't, but the automobiles help. Maggie served tea before she went to Ward's,

and he's going on with it. His luck has turned. He's got the money to pay this year's interest and half the back interest that's due, but he wants to keep it and put it into repairs—the roof wants shingling, and if we could fix up the storeroom for a place to serve tea and ice-cream we could double trade. Then, next year——"

"We've heard too much about next year, Donovan."

"Don't get tragic, Theodore. This is a new proposition. I'll go into figures with the Judge and prove it to him—don't want to waste them on you. But he won't be sending good money after bad this time, like he's done too many times. I'm as glad for him as I am for Uncle."

"It can't be done."

"Nonsense, Theodore. I won't wait to see the Judge now, but you tell him——"

"It don't make any difference what I tell him. The Judge has made up his mind, and he won't change it. You can take it from me as well as him. You won't get another dollar of his money, and you won't get another month's extension of time. We're done with you."

"I almost believe you mean that, Theodore."

"As I said, the house is insufficient security, but for the sake of the dignity of the firm we must protect ourselves——"

"I believe you mean it, and the Judge gave you authority to say it."

"We must go through the form of protecting ourselves and——"

His client laughed. "You don't mean the Judge wants to take over the house. That's 'Way Down East stuff. If money's tight with him, we'll pay the interest and manage some way, though I don't see how. But the house would be no good to him if he took it, and he wouldn't take it if it was. I know the Judge. Don't let your imagination get away with you, Theodore."

"I'm sorry for you, Donovan."

"You think he's going to take it?"

"I know he is."

"You mean that," his client decided slowly, "and you've got the Judge's authority for it, too."

"Take it quietly. It's the best way," urged the junior partner helpfully.

"I understand that's your motto, Theodore," said his client, and proceeded to take his advice, sitting quite still in the Judge's big chair, and fixing a clear-seeing but unappreciative gaze upon the immaculate folds of Mr. Burr's turquoise-blue tie. He took the advice too literally. The silence grew oppressive and sinister, and as if he found it so,

Mr. Burr broke into a monologue, disjointed, but made up of irreproachable sentiments.

"This is hard on your uncle, Neil, and it's hard on you, but it may be the best thing in the end. He's been hiding behind you too long. A business that can't stand on its own feet deserves to fail. He can start new and start clean. The Judge has been a good friend to you——"

"Don't explain him to me. You don't own him, whoever else does," interrupted the Judge's protégé softly.

"What do you mean? If you don't think you're getting a square deal, say so."

"Do you want me to weep on your shoulder, Theodore?"

"The Judge is your friend, and," Mr. Burr added handsomely, "I'm your friend, too."

His client arose briskly, as if encouraged by this. "Theodore, you don't want to tell me what's back of your turning me down?" he asked. "No, I thought not. Well——"

"I'm your friend," repeated Mr. Burr, generously if irrelevantly, and this time without effect. His client had crossed the room without another glance at him, and had his hand on the knob of the Judge's office door. His manner still had the composure which Mr. Burr had advocated, but his face was very pale, ominously pale, and his brown

eyes were changed and bright, dangerously bright. To imaginative eyes like Mr. Burr's he must have looked suddenly taller.

Mr. Burr was facing an unmistakable crisis, with no time to wonder how long it had been forming, or why. He hurried after the boy and caught him fiercely if ineffectively by the arm.

"You can't go in there," stated Mr. Burr arbitrarily, all logic deserting him. "You can't. You don't know——"

"Oh, I'm not going to knife the Judge," his client explained kindly. "I'm only going to find out what's back of this."

"Take it quietly," was the ill-chosen sentiment which suggested itself to Mr. Burr. Neil Donovan swung round angrily, and paused to reply to it, with fires which the somewhat negative though offensive personality of the pink young man could never have kindled alight in his brown eyes.

"Quietly? There's been too much of that in this town. I'm sick of it. The only friend I've got who hasn't got one foot in the gutter goes back on me for no reason at all, the first time I ask a favour of him that don't amount to picking his pockets. The only big man in this rotten town who's halfway straight since Everard turned the town rotten begins to act like he wasn't straight.

What's back of it? I'm going to know. Get out of my way, Theodore."

"You don't know who's in there."

"I don't care. I'm going to know." Disposing of the hovering and anxious intervention of Mr. Burr, and throwing the door open, he slammed it in the pink young man's perturbed face, and stepped alone out of the sunshine into the Judge's dim little inner office.

The Judge's friendly littered little room was not so inviting in working hours as it was in the hospitable hours of late afternoon. It was like a woman seen in evening dress by daylight. But the boy who had invaded it so hotly unmasked no conspiracy here. The men at the table near the one window, with a pile of official but entirely innocent looking papers between them, had every right to be there. They were the Judge and Colonel Everard.

The great man looked quite undisturbed by the boy's invasion, glancing up at him indifferently from the papers that he was turning over with his finely moulded, delicately used hands; he even looked mildly amused, but the boy turned to him first instinctively, and not to the Judge, who was peering at him with troubled and kindly eyes over the top of his glasses.

"I've got to speak to the Judge. I'm sorry."

He stammered out his half-apology awkwardly enough, but the smouldering fires were still alight in his brown eyes, tragic fires of cowed and rebellious youth. The great man regarded him indifferently for a minute and then turned rather ostentatiously to his papers again.

"Judge, I've got to speak to you alone."

"You can't just now, son."

"I've got to."

"Why?"

The Judge's kind, drawling voice was not quite as usual, and his blue, near-sighted eyes were not; they were wistful and deprecating, and rather tired, a beaten man's eyes, eyes with an irresistible appeal to the race that is vowed to lost causes, this boy's race. The boy stepped instinctively closer.

"I don't blame you, sir, but I've got to understand this and know what's behind it."

"Better go home before you say anything you'll be sorry for, Neil."

"Why did you go back on me?"

"You're taking a sentimental attitude about a business matter. It's natural enough that you should. I'm sorry for you, son."

"Why——"

The Judge drew himself up a shade straighter in his chair, and met the boy's insistent challenge with sudden dignity, kindly but judicial, peculiarly

his own, but his flashes of it were not very frequent now.

"Neil," he said deliberately, "I've got nothing to say to you alone. I've got nothing to say to you at all that Mr. Burr hasn't said. Is that quite clear to you?"

It was entirely clear. The Judge had left no room for uncertainty or argument, and the boy did not attempt to argue or even to answer. He stood looking uncertainly down at the Judge, as if for the moment he could not see anything in the room quite distinctly, the Judge's face, with its near-sighted blue eyes and red-gold beard and thinning hair, or Colonel Everard's clear-cut profile.

"Better go," said the Judge gently.

"I'd better go," the boy repeated mechanically, but he did not move.

Colonel Everard put down his papers deliberately, and favoured him with a glance, amused and surprised, as if he had not expected to find him still in the room, and was prepared to forget at once that he was there; a disconcerting sort of glance, but the boy's brown eyes met it gallantly, and cleared as they looked. They grew bright and defiant again, with a little laugh in the depths of them. The ghost of a laugh, too, lurked in the boy's low voice somewhere.

"You're right, Judge. I'll go. I'm wasting my time here," he said, "asking you who's back of what you've done to me—when I know. I won't ask you again, but I'll ask you, I'll ask you both, who's back of everything that's crooked or wrong in this town? Little or big, he's back of it all; straight back of it, or well back of it, hiding his face and pulling the wires. He's to blame for it all, for he's made the town what it is.

"He's got his hand on the neck of the town, and got hold of it tighter, gradual, so nobody saw it and knocked it off; tighter and tighter, squeezing the life out. He never made a gift to the town with one hand that he didn't take it back with the other. What the town gets without him giving it, he won't let it keep. The whole town's got his stamp on it, grafting and lying and putting up a front. The whole town's afraid of him. The Judge here, that's the best man in town, don't dare call his soul his own. Me, I'm afraid of him, too, and the only reason I dare stand up and say to his face what's said behind his back is because I've got nothing to lose. It's him, there——"

"Don't, son," muttered the Judge tardily, unregarded, but Colonel Everard listened courteously, with a faint, amused smile growing rather stiff on his thin lips.

"Him, that's too good to speak to me or look

at me, sitting there grinning, and reading fine print, making out not to care, he's back of it all—him, Everard."

The two men, who had heard him out, did not interrupt him now. It was only a passionate jumble of boyish words they had listened to, but behind it, vibrating in his tense voice, was something bigger than he could frame words to express, something that commanded silence; pain forcing its way into speech, long repression broken at last. The dignity of it was about him still, though his brown eyes flashed no more defiance, and he was only a shabby and hopeless boy walking uncertainly to the office door, and fumbling with the handle.

"I'll go out this way," he said. "I've had enough of Theodore. And I've had enough of this place. I'll say good morning, gentlemen."

In a prosaic and too often unsatisfactory world, which is not the stage, no curtain drops to relieve you of the embarrassment of thinking what to say next after a record speech; you have to step out of the limelight, and walk somewhere else. Neil Donovan, emerging from the ancient building which contained Judge Saxon's office into Post-office Square after a brief interval of struggling successfully for self-control in a dusty corridor little suited to such struggles, and not even en-

suring the privacy which is wrongly believed to be necessary for them, had one more appointment to keep. He was late for it already. He glanced at the town clock and started off hurriedly to keep it.

Back of Court-house Hill another street, starting parallel to Court Street, rapidly loses its sense of direction and its original character of a business street, wavers to right and left, past a scatter of discouraged looking houses, and finally slants off in the general direction of the woods at the edge of the town, and the abortive, sparsely wooded hill known to generations of picnickers—not the élite of the town, but humbler, more rowdy picnickers—as Mountain Rock.

The street never reaches it, but loses itself in a grubby tangle of smaller streets, thickly set with small houses, densely and untidily populated, the section known at first derisively and later in good faith as Paddy Lane. Through the intricate geography of this quarter Colonel Everard's only openly declared enemy might have been seen making a hasty and expert way ten minutes later; quickly and directly as it permitted him to, he approached the base of the hill.

Disregarding more public and usual ways of ascent, he struck straight across a stubbly field that lay behind a row of peculiarly forlorn and tumble-

down houses into a path so narrow that it was hard to see until you were actually looking down it, between the twin birches that marked the entrance. He followed it to the base of the cliff itself. The belt of stunted birches and dusty-looking alders that skirted the cliff was broken by an occasional scraggly pine. The boy stopped under one of them, leaned against the decaying trunk, produced a letter, and read it.

It was only a pencilled scrawl of a letter, on the roughest of copy paper, and so crumpled that he must have been quite familiar with it, but he read it intently.

"Neil," it ran, "I'll meet you Saturday, on top of Mountain Rock, same time and place. I shan't see you till then. I don't want to. You frightened me last night. I don't like you lately. Be nice to me Saturday. JUDITH."

Only a pencilled scrawl, but he knew every word of it by heart, and of the burst of excited speech in the Judge's office nothing remained in his mind but the general impression that he had made a fool of himself there. Perhaps he was too familiar with Judith's letter, for the sting he had found there at first was gone from the words. He looked at them dully.

"I can't stand much more," he said aloud.

He said it lifelessly, and with no defiance in his eyes, stating only a wearisome fact. He had seen the Colonel's face through a kind of red mist in the Judge's office, and felt reckless and strong. He did not feel like a hero now. He was tired.

He would hardly have cared just now if you had told him that back in Judge Saxon's office two men who had not moved from their chairs since he left them, and who would not move until several vital points were settled, were discussing something he would not have believed them capable of discussing at such length and with so much feeling —the fortunes of the Donovan family.

He did not care just now for the little sights and sounds of spring that were all around him, the cluster of arbutus leaves at his feet, the faint, nestling bird noises, sweeter than song, and the stir and rustle of tiny, unclassified sounds that were signs of the pulse of spring beating everywhere, of change and growth going on whether human beings perceived or denied it.

"I can't stand any more," said the boy.

Up the cliff to his right, strewn with pine needles that were brown-gold in the sun, a steep and tiny trail led the way to the top of the hill and his rendezvous. Now the boy crushed Judith's letter into his pocket, turned to the trail with a sigh, and began to climb.

CHAPTER TEN

"THEY won't like it, Judith," said Mrs. Randall for the last time, as she slipped into her evening coat.

"They? If you mean the Colonel——"

"I do."

Judith, looking up at her mother from the chaise-longue, could not have seen the radiant vision that she had adored as a child, when the spring and the Everards and the habit of evening dress all returned at once to Green River. Mrs. Randall's blue gown was the creation of a Wells dressmaker, but lacked the charm of earlier evening frocks, anxiously contrived with the help of a local seamstress, when the clear blue that was still her favourite colour had been her best colour, when there was a touch more pink in the warm white of her complexion, and before the tiny, worried line in her broad, low forehead was there to stay. But there was no reflection of these changes in her daughter's big, watching eyes.

"It will do him good not to like it," said Judith sweetly.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, Mamma. Is that the carriage? Don't be late."

Minna Randall looked down at her daughter in puzzled silence a moment, with the little line in her forehead deepening, then slipped to her knees beside her with a disregard for her new gown which was unusual, and put a caressing hand on her forehead, a demonstration which was more unusual still.

"Your head does feel hot," she said, "but to stay away from a dance at your age, just for a headache——"

"I went to one last night."

"A high school dance!"

"There won't be any more of them. You needn't grudge it to me." Judith buried her face in the cushions, and lay very still.

"But the Colonel really arranged this for you. Dancing bores him. He said you ought to be amused."

"He didn't say so to me."

"Are you laughing? I thought you were crying a minute ago." Judith gave no further signs of either laughing or crying. "Judith, what does he say to you? When you went with him to look at that night-blooming flower with the queer name, last week, and were gone so long, what did he talk to you about? You heard me. Please answer."

"He's a stupid old thing."

"What did he talk about?"

"I don't remember."

"Judith," Judith's mother stood plucking ineffectively at her long gloves, and looking at the motionless white figure, very slender and childish against the chintz of the cushions, soft, tumbled hair, and hidden face, with a growing trouble in her eyes, "I ought to talk to you—I ought to tell you—you're old enough now—old enough——"

Judith turned with a soft, nestling movement, and opened her eyes again, deep, watchful eyes that asked endless questions, and made it impossible to answer them, eyes that knew no language but their own, the secret and alien language of youth. Her mother sighed.

"You're the strangest child. Sometimes you seem a hundred years old, and sometimes—you don't feel too badly to stay alone? Mollie would have stayed in with you, or Norah."

"No. I would have gone, if I'd known you cared so much, but it won't do any good to make yourself late, Mamma. Father's calling," said Judith gravely. Still grave and unrelaxed, she returned her mother's rare good-night kiss, and watched her sweep out of the room, turning the rose-shaded night lamp low as she passed.

There was a hurry of preparation downstairs,

her mother's low, fretful voice and her father's high and strained one joined in a heated argument, and they started still deep in it, for her father did not call a good-night to Judith. The street door shut, and she was alone in the house. Carriage wheels creaked out of the yard and there was no returning sound of them in search of some forgotten thing; a long enough interval passed so that it was safe to infer that there would not be, but Judith lay as her mother had left her, as still as if her headache were really authentic, her questioning eyes on the rose-shaded light.

There was much that might have increased her mother's concern for her in her face, if you could interpret it fully; sometimes the eyes suggested a fair proportion of the hundred years her mother had credited her with, sometimes there was dawning fear in them, and sometimes an inconsequent, gipsy light; sometimes her soft lips trembled pitifully, and sometimes they smiled. Always it was a lovely face, rose flushed and eager in the rosy light, and always something was evident which was enough to account for her mother's concern and for more concern than her mother was capable of feeling; Miss Judith Devereux Randall was growing up.

Whatever questions occupied her answered themselves in a satisfactory way at last, even an

amusing way, for her smile had come to stay and her eyes were dancing, when she jumped up from the chaise-longue at last, turned on more lights, opened closets and bureau drawers all at once, dropped various hastily chosen and ill-assorted articles on the immaculate counterpane of her bed, and began to dress.

She dressed without a glance into the mirror, and without need of it, it appeared, when she stood before it at last, pulling a left-over winter tam over rebellious curls which she had made no attempt to subdue. She had buttoned herself hastily into the dress she had taken off last, a tumbled organdy, and thrown a disreputable polo coat over it, white like the cap, but of more prehistoric date, but on her slender person these incongruous garments had acquired a harmony of their own, and become a costume somehow. It might not have withstood a long or critical inspection, but it was not subjected to one. Youth, in its divinely suited garb of white, regarded itself with grave eyes for one breathless minute, flushed and coquetted with itself for another, and then was gone from the mirror. Judith turned off the lights and stole out of the room, and downstairs.

There was nothing in the dark and empty house to frighten her. It must have been fear of whatever was before her that made her slip so softly

across the hall, and tremble and stand still when the door chain rattled. The door was open at last. With a soft, inarticulate gasp of excitement, she stepped out into the May night.

Colonel Everard had an ideal night for the little dance in his garden, warm, but with a quiver of new life in the air. The May moon was in its last quarter, but lanterns were to supplement it. But the Colonel's guest of honour, pausing at the corner of Main Street and looking sharply to left and right, and then turning quickly off it, found very little light on the narrow and tree-fringed cross-street through which she was hurrying now but the moon.

It hung slender and pale and low above the ragged row of little houses, and seemed to go with her through the dark, but she took no notice of its companionship. The street was deserted, and the tap of her little heels sounded disconcertingly loud in the emptiness of it as she hurried on, turning from the narrow street into a narrower one.

This street had only one real end; pending the appropriation needed to carry it straight through, witheld by agencies which could only be connected by guess with Colonel Everard, it led feebly past a few houses which were nearly all untenanted and looked peculiarly so to-night, to a clump of

alders at the edge of an unpenetrated wood lot, where it had paused. Just in front of it the girl paused, too.

Her small, white-coated figure was only dimly to be seen in the dark of the street; the group in the shadow of the trees was harder to see, but it moved; a horse pawed the ground impatiently, the boy in the buggy leaned forward and spoke to him. Then Judith started uncertainly toward him, and spoke softly, in the arrogant phrasing of lovers, to whom there is only one "you" in the world:

"Is that you?"

"Is it you?" the boy's voice came hoarse through the dark. "I thought you weren't coming. I waited an hour for you yesterday on the Rock."

"I couldn't help it. I oughn't to be here now, and I almost didn't come, but I thought we'd have to-night. Neil, you hurt my hand. Be nice to me."

She was standing close beside him now, and they could see each other's faces, white and strange in the dark, but the boy's looked whiter, and his breath came oddly, in irregular gasps. He held both her hands in his, but he did not bend down to her, nor kiss her.

"What makes you look so queer? I don't like

you. Be nice to me." There was something terribly wrong with the smug little phrases, or with any words at all just then, there in the heart of the silent dark, and facing the strangeness of the boy's eyes; words failed her suddenly, and she pulled her hands away, and hid her face in them. "I won't go with you—I'll go home, if you aren't nice to me—if——"

"You can't go home now." There was something in the boy's voice that was like the fierce clasp of his hands, something from which it was not so easy to escape. "It might be better if you hadn't come, better for both of us, but you can't go back now. It's too late. Yes, we'll have tonight. Get in, Judith."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GET in, Judith."

"I won't go. You can't make me."

The boy did not answer or move. Boy and buggy and horse—Charlie Brady's ancient chestnut mare, not such a dignified creature by daylight, but high shouldered and mysterious now against the dark of the grove—might all have been part of the surrounding dark, they were so still, and Judith's little white figure was motionless, too.

Judith stood looking up at the boy for one long, silent minute. Such minutes are really longer than other minutes, if you measure them by heartbeats, and how else are you to measure them? Strange, breathless minutes, that settle grave questions irrevocably by the mere fact of their passing, whether you watch them pass with open eyes or are helpless and young and vaguely afraid before them; helpless, but full of the untaught strength of youth, which works miracles without knowing how or why.

"Get in," said the boy, very softly this time, so that his voice just made itself heard through the

dark; it was like part of the dark, caressing and hushed and secret, and not to be denied. With a soft little laugh that was attuned to it, Judith yielded suddenly, and slipped into the carriage beside him, drawing the robe tight round her, and settling into her corner, all with one quick, nestling motion, like a bird perching.

"Where are we going?" she said rather breathlessly, "Hurry. Let's go a long, long way."

"All right. Don't be frightened, Judith."

"Frightened?"

He did not answer. Charlie's horse, debarred from its destined career by bad driving, that broke its wind in its first race, but of sporting ancestry and unable to forget it, especially when Charlie's adventures in the Green River under-world cheated it of exercise too long, was remembering it now, and bolting down the hilly little street, settled at last into a jerky and tentative gait with the air of accepting their guidance until it could arrange further plans, but remembering its ancestry still.

"Splendid," Judith breathed. "Keep off Main Street."

"Yes."

The ancient vehicle, well oiled, but rattling faintly still, swung alarmingly close to one street corner lamp-post and then another. Judith nestled almost out of sight in her corner. Neil leaned

forward, gripping the reins with an ungloved hand that whitened at the knuckles, his dark eyes looking straight ahead. His brooding eyes and quiet mouth, and even the whiteness of his face had something unfamiliar about them, something that did not all come from the unhealthy light of the street lamps, something strange but unaccountably charming, too. Judith had no eyes for it just then.

"This is silly. I ought not to have come. Who's that?"

"Nobody. Just a tree. Sit still. We'll go under the railroad bridge and out over Grant's Hill. There won't be any more lights."

"It looked like some one."

"What do you care?"

"It looked like your cousin Maggie."

"She's at home in bed. She was tired to-night."

"Oh. Well, it looked like her. It was silly to come. I never shall come again."

As if this were not a new threat, or had for some reason lost it terrors to-night, the boy did not contradict her. They had left track and railroad bridge behind now, darker blots against the surrounding dark, with the lights of the station showing faintly far down the track. They were passing the last of the houses that straggled along the unfashionable quarter above the railroad track.

Most of the houses here were dark now. In the Nashs' windows the last light puffed suddenly out as they went by.

Down in the town behind them other sleepy little lights were burning faintly, or going out, but ahead of them the faintly moonlit road looked wide-awake. It was an alluring road. It dipped into wooded hollows, it broke suddenly into arbitrary curves and windings but found its way out again, and kept on somehow, and gradually lifted itself higher and higher toward the crest of the hill five miles away that you reached without ever seeming to climb it, to be confronted all at once with the only real view between Wells and Green River.

"I used to think Grant's Hill was the end of the world," said Judith softly. "Maybe it is. It's funny I can say things like that to you, when you only laugh and won't answer. Listen. Isn't it still, so still it almost makes a noise."

It was very still. You could feel the pulse of the night here. There was a whisper and stir of life in the rustling trees when the road crossed some belt of woods; there was a look of blind, creeping life about the clustering shadows in stretches of moonlight, and the low-hanging moon above the dark fields they passed was a living thing, too, the most alive of all. Judith stirred in her corner, and turned and looked at it.

"It's sweet," she said. "And it's ours. It's still May. But we can't wish on the moon now; it's too late. And I don't want to wish, I'm so comfortable. Aren't you? Well, you needn't answer, then, and you needn't hold my hand." She had felt for a hand that avoided hers. With a sleepy, satisfied laugh, like a petted kitten purring, she settled herself again, with her head against an unresponsive shoulder, and pulled an unresponsive arm round her waist.

"You aren't as soft as the cushions—not nearly. You're pretty hard, but I like you. I was afraid to come, but now——"

"Now what?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of. I'm so happy. There's nobody in the world but you and me. Neil, I'm going to sleep."

"All right. Shut your eyes, then, and don't keep staring at me. What makes your eyes so bright?"

"You."

"Shut your eyes."

"All right. Nobody but you and me."

They were really alone in the world now, alone in the heart of the night. Their little murmur of talk, so low that they could just hear it themselves, had been such a tiny trickle of sound that it did not quite break the silence, and now it had died

away. Asleep or awake, the girl was quite still, with her cheek pressed against the boy's shoulder, and her long-lashed eyes tight shut. The horse carried them over the moonlit road at a rate of speed that did not seem possible from its strange, loping gait. The effect of it was uncanny.

Boy and girl and queer, high-shouldered horse, darkly silhouetted in the moonlight, lost to sight in the shadows of tall trees that looked taller in the dark, and then coming silently into view again, were like dim, flitting shadows in the night; like peculiarly helpless and insignificant shadows, restless and purposeless. The moon, soft and far away and still, seemed more alive than they did, and more competent to adjust their affairs.

They required adjusting. That was in the watching brightness of the girl's eyes, fluttering open once or twice, only to close quickly again, in the tenseness of the boy's arm around her, in the set of his shoulders and lift of his stubborn young chin, in the very air that he breathed uneasily, the soft, disturbing air of the May night. It was not a boy and girl quarrel that was before them: it was something more. It was the strangest hour that had come to them in their secret treasury of strange hours that were touched with the glamour of black magic and swayed by laws they did not

know. It might be the darkest hour. It was the test hour.

There is no sure and easy way through such hours. If they faced theirs unprepared and afraid, so must the rest of the world, the part that is older and counted wiser. But this could have been no comfort just then to the boy and girl in the antiquated buggy, under the untroubled gaze of the wishing moon.

They were almost on the crest of the hill now. One long, upward slant of road led straight to it, bare of trees, and silvery in the moonlight. At the foot, and just at the edge of a thick belt of woods, the boy pulled up as if to rest his horse for the gradual ascent. At his left, hardly visible at all to-night unless you stopped your horse to look for it, a narrow and overgrown road led off through the trees. Tightening the arm that held her cautiously, the boy looked down at the face against his shoulder, the faint, half-smile on the lips, and the lightly closed eyes.

The girl did not move. Her cap had slipped off, and one small, bare hand clutched the fuzzy white thing tight, as a sleeping child's hand might have closed on some favourite toy. Her hair showed silvery blond and soft against his dark coat. With a quick, hungry motion, the boy dropped his head and kissed it lightly. Then, gripping

the reins with a firmness that no present activity of the animal called for, he left Green River's only noteworthy view without a backward glance, and turned his horse into the road through the woods.

For the next few minutes he had no attention to spare for Judith, suspiciously quiet in his arms. He could not see her face. It was black dark under the trees, dark as if it had never been light. The track was wider than it looked, but also rougher. The trees grew close. Branches that he brushed aside sprinkled dew into his face. The buggy creaked out vain protests and useless warnings. Finally moonlight showed at the end of the black tunnel, and the horse, which had been encountering its difficulties in resourceful silence, made a faint, snorting comment which sounded relieved, and presently, with unexpected jauntiness, swung into the road again.

It was technically a road, and it was the wreck of a very good road, but it was not in much better shape than the track they had reached it by. Aspiring amateurs had sketched it and camera fiends haunted it in their day. It was Colonel Everard's favourite bridle path, which naturally prevented repairs upon it. But before the railroad went through it had been Green River's only link with a wider world. Now a better built but more circuitous road had replaced it, designed

for motoring. No motors ever penetrated here, and few carriages. It was left to the ghosts of ancient traffic, if they ventured here. The glancing moonlight under the close-growing trees might have been full of them to-night.

But the boy was not looking for ghosts or interested in the history of the road or its charm, as he hurried his high-shouldered horse along it, still responding jauntily. He squared his chin more stubbornly than ever, and muttered encouragingly to the horse, and reached for his battered whip. Round this corner, beyond this milestone, the stage drivers used to make up time when the mail was late. A generous mile of almost level road curved ahead of Neil into the moonlight, a fairly clean bit of going even now. Judith and Neil were on the old coaching road to Wells.

Neil reached for his whip, but did not take it out of the socket. A small hand closed over his. The head on his shoulder did not move, but dark eyes, watchful and deliberate, opened and looked up at him quietly.

"Now," said a cool little voice, "you can take me home."

"You're awake?"

"Of course."

"Then why——"

"I waited to see where you were going, and

what you were going to do," explained Judith simply. They were covering the banner stretch of road at a rate the old stage drivers had never emulated. Judith pushed Neil's arm away, and sat straight and looked at him. Her cheeks were gloriously flushed with the quick motion, and her soft, tumbled hair had broken into baby curls round her forehead, but her eyes were a woman's dark, unforgiving eyes. Neil gave her one furtive glance, and looked away.

"I told you to take me home," she said.

He made a muttered reply, inarticulate, so that it would have been hard to tell whether it was really addressed to Judith or the horse, and bent forward over the reins.

The colour deepened in Judith's cheeks, her soft lips tightened into a straight line that was like her mother's mouth. Her cool, unhurried voice was like her mother's, too: "I knew when we started out I'd have trouble with you. Now I don't intend to have any more. I don't want to have to tell you again. Take me home."

She had adopted the tone which Green River's self-made gentlewomen like Mrs. Theodore Burr mistakenly believed to be effective with servants. The boy beside her gave no sign that it was effective with him. He spoke softly to the horse again, and flicked at it coaxingly with the whip.

"Neil, I am sorry for you," Judith stated presently, with no sympathy whatever in her judicial young voice. "I have been awfully good to you."

"Good!"

"Yes, good. I—had to be. Because I knew we didn't have much time. I knew—this—would have to stop some day. I knew it and you knew it, too. You always knew it. Well, I've been trying to tell you for a long time that it had got to stop. I tried, but you wouldn't let me. We're both getting older, too old for this, and I'm going away next year. And some things have happened to me, just lately—last week—that made me think. I've got to be careful. I've got to take care of myself. This has got to stop now—to-night. I wanted to tell you so. That's why I came; because——"

"I know why you came."

"Don't be cross. Be good, and turn round now, and take me home. Neil, I'm not sorry, you know, for—anything. Ever since that first night at the dance you've been so sweet to me. I'm not sorry. Are you?"

"No."

"How funny your voice sounds. Why don't you turn round?"

He had no explanation to offer. The buggy

plunged faster through the dark, and Judith braced herself in her corner.

"Neil, turn round. Don't you hear me?"

He gave no sign of hearing. The horse swung gallantly into a bit of road where the stage drivers had never been in the habit of hurrying, a tricky bit of road, with overhanging rocks jutting out just where you might graze them at sudden turns, and with abrupt dips into percipitous hollows. One stretched dark ahead of them now. Judith caught her breath as they plunged into it, and clutched Neil's arm. He laughed shortly, and did not shake off her hand. She pulled at his wrist and shook it.

"Upset us if you want to. We'd go together," he urged, with a logic not to be questioned. "Together, and that suits me, Judy."

"Neil, turn round. Neil!" Judith's voice was shrill with sudden terror repressed too long, but she struggled to make it steady and cold again, in one last effort at control.

"Who do you think you are, Neil Donovan? I tell you to take me home."

He did not even turn to look at her. He was getting the horse down the rocky slant of dimly lit road with a patience and concentration which there was nobody to appreciate just then. Judith collapsed into her corner. There was a faint sound

of helpless crying from her, then silence as she choked back the tears; silence, and an erect, stubborn figure showing oppressively big and dark between Judith and the moon.

"Neil, I'm sorry. . . . Neil, I can't stand this," came a muffled voice. "Please speak to me."

They were on level ground again, and the horse was disposed to make the most of it. The boy pulled her into a jolting walk which was not the most successful of her gaits, but represented a triumph for him just now, and then he turned abruptly to Judith, gathering both her hands into his free hand and gripping them tight.

"I'll talk to you now," he said. "It's time I told you. Judith, you and I are not going back."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"WHAT do you mean?"

"We're not going back," he repeated deliberately.

"We are!" flashed Judith

"We're not going back. We're never going back."

Judith drew back and stared at him, her hands still in his, and the boy stared back with a look that matched her own in his big, deeply lit, dark eyes. White faces, with angry, dark eyes, were all that they could see clearly, though they were crossing a patch of road where a ragged gap in the trees let some of the moonlight through; white faces like strangers' faces.

They were only a boy and girl jolting through the woods in the night in a rattletrap buggy behind a caricature of a horse, but what looked out of their angry eyes and spoke in their tense young voices was greater than the immediate issue of their quarrel, and older and wiser than they were; as old as the world. Ancient enemies were at war once more. A man and a woman were making their age-old fight for mastery over themselves and each other.

"Never, Judy."

"Where are we going, then?"

"What difference does it make?"

"Where?"

"To Wells. We can make it by morning. I've got the mortgage money with me."

"Your uncle's?"

"Yes. What difference does that make? That, or anything? We'd go if we hadn't any money at all. We'd have to. Oh, Judith——"

"You don't know what you're saying. Take me home. What are you laughing at?"

"You. You sounded just like them, then, giving me orders—just like your whole rotten crowd, but you're through with them now, and you're through ordering me about and making a fool of me. I've been afraid to say my soul was my own. It wasn't, I guess. But we're all through with that. We're through, Judith."

"Yes, of course. Of course we're through. It's all right. Everything's all right, Neil dear."

"Everything's all wrong, and I know whose fault it is now: it's your fault. Maybe I only had one chance in a hundred to get on, but one chance is enough, and I was taking it. You made me ashamed to take it. I was ashamed to do the work that was all I could get to do, and I had my head so full of you I couldn't do any work. Mag-

gie's better than I am. She don't sit around with her hands folded and wait for Everard to get tired of her. And the whole town don't laugh at her. The whole town don't know——"

"Neil, I said I was sorry. Please don't."

"You've got the smooth ways of them all, but it's too late for that between us, Judy. Smooth, lying ways."

"We can't go to Wells, Neil dear. What could we do there? Think."

"I'm sick of thinking. I'd get work maybe. I don't know. I don't care. Judith——"

"We can't. Not to-night, Neil. Wait."

"I'm sick of waiting. I've got nothing to gain by it. I've done all the waiting I could. I've stood all I could. You're the only thing I want in the world, and I couldn't wait for you any longer if I could get you that way—and I wouldn't get you. I'd lose you."

"Not to-night. To-morrow, if you really want me to go. To-morrow, truly."

"You're lying to me, and I'm tired of it."

"No, Neil—Neil dear."

"You're lying."

"How dare you say that! I hate you!"

"That's right. We'll talk straight now. It's time."

"I hate you. Don't touch me. You're going

to take me home—you must—and I'm never going to speak to you again. I think you're crazy. But I'm not afraid of you—I'm not afraid."

The low-keyed, hurrying voices broke off abruptly. There was no sound in the buggy but Judith's rapid breathing, more and more like sobs, but no tears came. The two faces that confronted each other were alike in the gloom, white and angry and very young; alike as the faces of enemies are when they measure each other's strength in silence. It was a cruel, tense little silence, but the sound that broke it was more cruel. It was dry and hard and had nothing to do with his own conquering laugh, that the girl knew, but it came from the boy.

"How dare you laugh at me. I hate you!" Judith's voice came hoarse and unrecognizable.

A hand caught blindly at the reins; another hand closed over it. Then there was silence again in the buggy, broken by panting sounds and little sobs. At the end of it Judith, forced back into her corner and held there, was really crying now, with hysterical sobs that hurt, and hot tears that hurt, too.

"Let me go," she panted. "I hate you! You've got to let me go."

"What for?"

"I'm going home. I'm going to get out and walk home."

"Ten miles?"

"I'd walk a hundred miles to get away from you."

"You'd have to walk farther to do that." The dry little laugh cut through the dark again, and Judith struck furiously at the arm that held her.

"I hate you!" she sobbed.

"No."

"Oh, I do—I do——"

"I don't care." The boy's voice sounded light and dry, like his laugh. "I don't care. Kiss me."

"I won't! I won't! I'll never speak to you again. I'll never forgive you."

"Lying to me—fooling me; taking me up and dropping me like Everard does to women. . . . You're no better than he is. You're one of his crowd, but you're through with them. . . . Lying to me, when you do care. You do."

"I hate you!"

"Ah, no, you don't."

Little bursts of confused speech, all they had breath for and more, disconnected, not always understood, not always articulate, but always angry, came from them, with intervals of silent, panting struggle between. The two young creatures in the buggy were struggling in earnest now. The struggle was clumsy, like most really significant ones; sudden and clumsy and blind. The

two figures swayed aimlessly back and forth. The boy and girl were both on their feet now. The boy had dropped the reins. Both arms held the girl. Her pinioned arms fought to free themselves.

"Judith, you don't hate me. Say it—say it."

The two shadowy figures were like one now, but the girl's arms were free, pushing the boy away, striking at him impotently.

"You needn't say it. I know. You had to come to-night. You couldn't stay away. You don't hate me. You never will. You couldn't. I'm crazy about you. You're the only thing that matters, if we should die the next minute. Everything's all wrong, and it's not my fault or yours. Everything's wrong, and this is wrong, too, but I don't care and you don't. Do you? Do you?"

"Neil, let me go. I can't breathe."

"I love you."

"Let me go."

The shadow figures swayed and then were still. The girl's arms dropped. The little, one-sided struggle was over. There was a long, tired sigh, and then silence; silence, and one shadow face bending hungrily over the other shadow face. "Judith," the boy whispered breathlessly, "do you hate me now?"

"Yes."

"Do you want me to let you go? Do you want me to take you home?"

"Yes," came the same answering whisper, the faintest and most uncertain of whispers, but two arms, gently freeing themselves, found their way to his shoulders, two hands locked behind his head and drew it gently down, until the two shadow faces were close once more, and lips that were not shadow lips met and clung together; not shadow lips, but hungry and warm and alive—untaught but unafraid young lips, ready for kisses that are no two alike and can never come again—wonderful kisses that blot everything out of the changing world but themselves.

"Judith"—the boy lifted his head at last, and looked down at the face against his shoulder, pale and small, but with all the colour and light and life that night had taken from the world and hidden, burning undimmed in the awakening eyes—"you don't want me to take you home? You don't—care what happens?"

"No."

He could hardly hear her low whisper, but her face was answer enough, even for a boy who could not know what had touched it with new beauty, but had to guess, as his own heart and the night might teach him.

"No, I don't care. I don't care."

"Judith, you do love me?"

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"You're so sweet," he whispered, "I feel as if I'd never kissed you before—or seen you before. I love you, Judith."

"Yes."

"I love you and I don't want to hurt you. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"But nothing's going to take you away from me now."

"Nothing."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"I tell you, I don't care what happens I—don't—care."

"Judith!"

Once more her hands drew him close; shy hands, groping uncertainly in the dark, and shy lips kissed him. It was the coolest and lightest of kisses, but it was worth all the others, if the boy knew how much it promised—more than all her broken speech had promised, more than any spoken words.

Judith herself did not know, but some instinct older than she was made her whisper: "Be good to me. Will you be good to me?"

"Yes, Judith."

The boy answered her small, shaken whisper solemnly, as if he were taking a formal and irrev-

ocable vow, but there was no one to listen to it here, and bear witness to it as irrevocable. The girl did not answer him. Suddenly shy, breathing quickly, and trying to laugh, she slipped out of his arms.

The boy let her go. Some time before the trailing reins had been caught up and twisted twice round the whip socket. He had done this instinctively, he could not have told just when. He bent down and untwisted them now, rather slowly and awkwardly, not looking at Judith. Then he sat down stiffly beside her.

"You're tired," he said, with new gentleness in his voice. He put an arm loosely round her waist in the manner of an affectionate but inexperienced parent, and her head dropped on his shoulder. "Very tired?"

"No."

"Judith, I'm sorry."

"No, I'm sorry. How could I be so horrid? What made me? Did I hurt you, dear, with my hands?"

"You couldn't hurt me."

"Neil, you know what you said just now?"

"Never mind what I said."

"You said you didn't want anything to take me away from you. Well, if it did, if anything did take me away from you—now, I'd——"

"What, dear?"

"I'd never forgive you. I couldn't. I'd c spise you." This warning came in a low, unc tain voice, wasted, as countless warnings ha been wasted on wiser masculine ears than t boy's. "Look at our moon up there. It's gl I guess—glad about you and me. Why do you listen to me?"

"I'm thinking, Judith. I've got to think."

"You look very nice when you think. Yc eyes look so big and still. You look—beautif I could really sleep now, I guess."

"All right, dear."

"But I don't want to. I'm too happy. H late is it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, it's late. We couldn't get home n before awfully late—two or something. And t road's so narrow here, we couldn't turn rou We couldn't go home if we wanted to. Cou we?"

"Not very well, dear."

"I'm glad. . . . Neil."

"Yes."

"Are you thinking now?"

"Yes."

"You do look beautiful. I don't know just wh I never saw you look just like this before; kin

but years older than I am, and miles away. Neil——"

"Yes, dear."

"Neil, don't think any more. Just love me. . . . I love you."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

COLONEL EVERARD'S little party was quite successful enough without the guest of honour. At least, it would have seemed so to Judith, if she could have looked in upon it just before midnight. A distinguished guest of the Colonel's had made an ungrateful criticism of the inner circle, on parade for his benefit only the week before at Camp Hiawatha, which was elaborately rebuilt now, and rechristened Camp Everard. He complained that the Colonel's parties were too successful.

"Too many pretty women," he said, "or they work too hard at it—dress too well, or talk too well—don't dare to let down. You need more background, more men like Grant. You need to be bored. You can't have cream without milk. You can't take the essentials of a society and make a whole society out of them without adulterating them. It won't last. That's why Adam and Eve didn't stay in the garden. They couldn't—too much tension there. They needed [illegible] acquaintances, and [illegible] can't get on witho[illegible]

"We do," said his host.

The distinguished critic was far away from the Colonel's town to-night, but the Colonel's party was all that he had complained of; the thing he had felt and tried to account for and explain was here, as it was at all the Colonel's parties, though a discreet selection of outsiders had been admitted to-night; the same sense of effort and tension, of working too hard, of a gayety brilliant but forced —artificial, but justifying the elaborate processes that created it by its charm, like some rare hot-house flower.

You saw it in quick glimpses of passing faces thrown into strong relief by the light of the swinging lanterns, and then dancing out of sight; you heard it in strained, sweet laughter, and felt it in the beat of the music, and in the whole picture the party made of itself in the garden, the restless, changing picture, but this was not all—it was in the air. You could close your eyes and breathe it and feel it. It was unusually keen to-night, real, like a thing you could actually touch and see.

You lost the keen sense of it if you looked too closely for signs. If you overheard bits of talk they were clever at all, or even showed under elaborate faces, as if Cinderside smutty fingers;

indeed, though they were trained to forget it and make you forget it, they were only so many Cinderellas, after all. Seen too closely, there was a look of strain about some of the men's faces.

There was a reason for this ook to-night, besides the set of reasons which the gentlemen of the Colonel's circle always had for looking worried; living beyond their incomes, living in uncertainty of any income at all, and other private reasons, different in each case, but all quite compelling; there was a reason, and the Colonel's guest of the week before was connected with it. Others would follow him soon, secret conferences would take place unrecorded, the Colonel's private telephone wire would be busy, and the telegrams be receivcd would be frequent and not intelligible to the casual reader. These were the months before election, when the things that were going to happen began to happen. Their beginnings were obscure. The man in the street talked politics, but the man with his hands in the game kept still. Even when they slipped away to the smoking-room, or gathered at the edge of the lawn in groups of two and three that scattered as their host approached, the Colonel's guests were not discussing politics to-night.

No tired lines were permitted to show in Mrs. Randall's face. Her fresh, cool prettiness was of the valuable kind that shows off best at the height

of the evening, when other women look tired. If she was aware of the fact and made the most of it, overworking her charming smile and wide-open, tranquil eyes, you could not blame her. It was not the time or place to overlook any weapons you might have. Whatever duties or privileges belonged to the Colonel's inner circle, you had to take care of yourself if you were part of it, and you learned to; that was evident from her manner. It seemed easy for her to-night. Just now she was sharing a bench and an evening cloak with Mrs. Burr, smooth, dark head close to her fluffy, blond one, and smiling into her face confidingly, as if all that lady's purring, disconnected remarks were equally agreeable to her.

"We miss Judy so much," she said sweetly.

"I can see just how much, dear," said Judith's mother more sweetly still.

"And it's so long since she's been here."

"She has her school work to do. She's just a child. She's not well to-night."

"But I got the idea he meant this to be her evening."

"He did."

"There he is." The third person singular, unqualified, could mean only one gentleman to the ladies of the Colonel's circle, and that gentleman was passing close to them now, though he

seemed unconscious of the fact. He was guiding Mrs. Kent through an old-fashioned waltz with elaborate precision. His concentration upon the performance increased as he passed them, and he not did look away from his partner's face, though it was not absorbingly attractive just now. The piquant profile had a blurred look, and the cheeks were flushed under the daintily calculated touch of rouge. Mrs. Burr turned to her friend with a faint but relentless light of amusement in her narrowed eyes.

"Edie's had just one cocktail too many."

"Yes." They ignored the more obvious fact that the Colonel had. The evening had reached the stage when he always had.

"He hasn't danced with you many times, Minna dear."

"I'm tired of dancing, but don't let me keep you here, Lil."

"I haven't seen him dance with you at all."

"He hasn't yet."

"No?" said Mrs. Burr, very casually.

"No. Lil, I think Ranny wants you. He's wandering about, looking vague."

"Don't you want me, dear? Well, Ranny always wants me."

Mr. Randolph Sebastian, discovering her suddenly, gave exaggerated proof of this as he carried

her off. If the Colonel's secretary had really been recruited from a dance hall, he had profited by what he saw there, and showed it in every quick, graceful turn he made. His partner was the type of woman that dancing might have been invented to show off; it gave her lazy, graciously built body a reason for being, and put a flicker of meaning into her shallow eyes so that she was not floridly pretty any longer, but beautiful. This was peculiarly apparent when she danced with Mr. Sebastian. She seemed to have been created for the purpose of dancing with him; it could not have been more apparent if their elaborate game of devotion to each other had been real, and they were really lovers.

Mrs. Clifford Kent, suddenly appearing alone, slipped into Mrs. Burr's empty place. Her dance with the Colonel was over. "My Lord's in fine form to-night," she confided without preliminary. "We're going to play blind-man's buff after the duchess goes home." The duchess was Mrs. Grant, the Honourable Joe's wife, still the first lady of Green River, but the younger women were beginning to make fun of her discreetly behind her back. "He told me the tiger story." This represented a triumph. Getting the Colonel's smoking-room stories at first hand instead of second hand, from their husbands, was the only form of rivalry

about which these ladies were frank with each other. "I got it out of Cliff first, anyway. He said he couldn't tell me, but he did. I made him. Where was Harry last night?"

"What do you mean?"

"Cliff had a crowd of men locked into his den until two, talking. Didn't Harry know about it?"

"What were they doing?"

"Just talking. The Colonel and I don't know who else. I heard two strange voices, and I didn't hear Harry's voice. Didn't Harry know?"

"I suppose so. What did they talk about?"

"Campaign stuff—prohibition or something. Cliff wouldn't tell me."

"Was Teddy Burr there?"

"I didn't hear him. What do you care?"

"I don't care."

"If Harry didn't know, I ought not to have told you, but I can't help it now."

"Edith, don't go. Wait."

"I can't. I have this next with my Lord, too. I'm going to sit it out in the library and meet him inside. The duchess is getting jealous. Besides, there comes the dragon." Judge Saxon, looking shabby and old and tired, was making a circuitous way toward them. "Let me go. Oh, darling—" she put her small, flushed face suddenly close to her friend's to ask the question, and after it,

fluttered away without waiting for the answer, leaving the echo of her pretty, empty laugh behind—"why didn't Judith come? What's the real reason? Has anybody been making trouble for her here? Never mind. You needn't tell me. Good-bye."

Mrs. Randall closed her eyes and pressed two fingers against her temples for a moment, and then looked up with almost her usual welcoming smile at Judge Saxon, who had come close to her, and stood looking down at her keenly with his kind, near-sighted, blue eyes.

"Hiding?" he said. "Tired?"

"Not hiding from you. Take care of me."

"Minna," he decided, "you little girls aren't so nice to me unless you're in wrong somehow and feel sorry for yourselves. What's the matter? Where's Harry?"

"Inside somewhere. Don't ask me any more questions. I've answered all I can to-night."

"All right. I'll just sit here and enjoy the view and keep the other boys away."

The view was hardly one to promote unmixed enjoyment. The two settled into a friendly silence in their corner, broken by an occasional quiet word in the Judge's intimate, drawling voice. Around them the temper of the party was changing, and a series of little signs marked the

general change. More men crowded into the smoking-room between dances, and they stayed longer. Mrs. Grant left first according to her established privilege, and a scattering of other guests followed her. Nobody seemed to miss them or to be conspicuously happier without them. There was a heavy, dull look about the passing faces, a heaviness and staleness now about the whole atmosphere of the party, and this, like the unnatural excitement which it followed, and like the light, endless fire of inconsequent, malicious chatter, always the same, whether it meant nothing or meant real trouble brewing, was an essential part of all the Colonel's parties, too.

The Judge regarded the change with faraway eyes, as he talked on in the wistful voice that goes with talking your own private language openly to people who cannot answer you in it.

"Don't need the moon, do we, with those lanterns? But it was here first, and will be a long time after, and it's a good moon, too; quite decorative for a moon."

"I hate it," said Mrs. Randall, with a personal vindictiveness not usually directed against natural phenomena. The Judge took no immediate notice of it. More guests had gone. In a cleared circle in the heart of the lanternlight Mrs. Kent was performing one of the more expurgated and

perfunctory of her dances for the benefit of the select audience that remained, to scattered, perfunctory applause. The motif of it was faintly Spanish.

"Paper doll," commented the Judge, "that's all that girl is. You and Harry are the best of them, Minna. They're a faky lot, all of them—about as real as a house of cards. It looks big, but it will all tumble down if you pull one card out—only one card. The devil of it is to know which card to take hold of, and who's to pull it out if you haven't got the nerve? I haven't. I'm too old. But it's a comfort to think of it. Don't you agree with me?"

"I didn't really hear you."

"Minna, I've known you since you were two. Can't you tell me what's the matter? You're frightened."

She looked at him for a minute as if she could, turning a paling face to him, with the mask off and the eyes miserable, then she tried to laugh.

"Nothing's the matter. Nothing new."

"Well, there's enough wrong here without anything new," said the Judge, rebuffed but still gentle. "I won't trouble you any longer, my dear. There comes Harry."

Mrs. Randall's husband, an unmistakable figure even with the garden and the broad, unlighted

lawn between, stood in the rectangle of light that one of the veranda windows made, slender and boyish still in spite of the slight stoop of his shoulders, and then started across the lawn toward the garden.

His wife got rather stiffly to her feet and waited, looking away from the lighted enclosure, over the low hedge, at the lawn. Her eyes were dizzy from the flickering lights. She could not see him clearly, and the figure that followed him across the lawn was harder to see.

It was a man's figure, slightly taller than her husband's. The man had not come from the veranda windows, or from the house at all, he had slipped round one corner of the house, stood still in the shelter of it, seeming to hesitate there, and then plunged suddenly across the lawn at a queer little staggering run. Twice she saw him stand still, so still that she lost sight of him under the trees, as if he had slipped away through the dark.

In the garden Mrs. Kent's performance was over, and the game of blind-man's buff was beginning. It was a novelty, and acclaimed even at this stage of the evening. Lillian Burr's shrill laugh and Edith Kent's pretty, childish one could be heard through the other sounds. They were trying to blindfold the Colonel, who struggled but laughed, too, looking somehow vacuous and

old, with his longish, white hair straggling across his forehead. No one in the garden but Minna Randall had attention to spare for an arriving guest, expected or unexpected.

Which was he? He was out of sight again, but this time she had seen him reach the edge of the lighted enclosure. Was he gone, or waiting outside, or had he stepped under the trellis of the rose arbour, to appear suddenly at the end of it and among them? Instinctively she kept her eyes upon it, though her husband had already passed through. She was watching for the figure that it might frame next.

"Harry," she said to her husband, who had seen her and elbowed his way to her, and stood beside her, looking pale and tired like herself in the lanternlight and not boyish at all, "who was that man? Who was it following you?"

He paid no attention to her question. He did not seem to hear it. He put a hand on her arm, and she could feel that it trembled.

"Oh, Harry, what is it?" she said. "I've had such a horrible evening. I'm so afraid."

"Don't be afraid, Minna," he said very gently, "but you must come to the telephone. Norah's calling you. She's just come home. She wants to tell you something about Judith."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"JUDITH?" Mrs. Randall took her husband's news quietly, with something that was almost relief in her face, the relief that comes when a gathering storm breaks at last, and you learn what it is you have been afraid of, though you must go on being afraid. "What is it? Is she ill, Harry?"

"Come and talk to Norah."

"No, we'll go straight home."

"But she's not there, Minna. That's all Norah'll say to me, but she's got some idea where she is, and says she'll tell you. Judith isn't there."

"It must be nearly morning."

"It's two."

"It was after nine when we started."

"Minna, didn't you hear what I said?"

Mrs. Randall's face had not changed as she heard; it looked unchangeable, like some fixed but charming mask that she wore. The lips still smiled though they had stiffened slightly, and she watched the two women's attempts to blindfold the Colonel—unaided now, but hilariously

applauded by the circle around her—with the same mild, interested eyes, wide-set and Madonna calm.

"I tell you, Judith's not there. What does Norah know? Why don't you do something? Where is she? . . . My God, look at them. What are they doing now? Look at Everard."

Mrs. Burr had drawn the knot suddenly tight in the white scarf she was manipulating, and slipped out of the Colonel's arms and out of reach. He followed, and then swung round and stumbled awkwardly after Edith Kent, who had brushed past him, leaving a light, challenging kiss on his forehead, and was further guiding him with her pretty, empty laugh. The game of blind-man's buff was under way.

Crowding the garden enclosure, swaying this way and that and threatening to overflow it, a pushing, struggling mass of people kept rather laboriously out of one another's way and the Colonel's, not so much amused by the effort as they were pretending to be; people with heavy and stupid faces who had never looked more irrevocably removed from childhood than now that they were playing a children's game.

In the heart of the crowd, now plunging ahead of it, now lost in it, the first gentleman of Green River disported himself. His white head was easy

to follow through the crowd, and the thing that made you follow it was evident even now—much of his old dignity, and the charm that was peculiarly his; you saw it in an occasional stubborn shake of his beautifully shaped head, in the grace of the hand that caught at some flying skirt and missed it. He was the first gentleman of Green River still, but he was something else.

His white hair straggled across his forehead moist and dishevelled, and his face showed flushed and perspiring against the white of the scarf. The trailing ends of the scarf flapped grotesquely about his head, and the high, splendidly modelled forehead was obscured and the keen eyes were hidden. The beauty of the face was lost, and the mouth showed thin lipped and sensual. The Colonel was really a stumbling, red-faced old man.

"Look at him. That's what she's seen. This was Judith's party. That's what we've hung on in this town for till it's too late to break loose. We never can get away now. We can't——"

"Keep still, Harry. Do you want to be heard? Did any one hear you at the telephone? Keep still and come home."

"You're right. You're wonderful. You don't lose your nerve."

"I can't afford to, and neither can you. Come ——Oh, Harry, look. I saw him following you.

What does he want? What's the matter? What is he going to do?"

Mrs. Randall had adjusted her cloak deliberately, and turned to pilot her husband out of the garden, slipping a firm little hand through his arm. Now she clung to him and stood still, silent after her little fire of excited questions. The entrance to the garden was blocked. An uninvited and unexpected guest was standing there.

His entrance had been unheralded, and his welcome was slow to come. The crowd had closed in round the Colonel, with Edith Kent caught suddenly in his arms, and giving a creditable imitation of attempting to escape. Interested silence and bursts of laughter indicated the progress of it clearly, though the two were entirely out of sight. Nobody saw the newcomer except the Randalls.

He stood in the entrance to the rose arbour, clutching at the trellis with one unsteady hand, and managing to keep fairly erect, a slightly built, swaying figure, black-haired and hatless. He kept one hand behind him, awkwardly, as a shy boy guards a favourite plaything. He was staring into the crowd in the garden as if he could see through into the heart of it, but had not the intellect just then to understand what he saw there.

It was the man Mrs. Randall had seen lurking in the shadow of the trees, but he was no myste-

rious stranger, though here in the light of the lanterns she hardly recognized him as she looked at his pale, excited face; it showed an excitement quite unaccounted for by the perfectly obvious fact that he was drunk, and entirely unconnected with that fact. Here and there on the outskirts of the crowd some one turned and saw him, too, and stared at him. They all knew him. He was Neil Donovan's cousin, the discredited young lawyer, Charlie Brady.

He did not speak or move. He only stood still and looked at them with vague, puzzled eyes, and lips that twitched as if he wanted to speak, but standing so, he had the centre of the stage. He could not command it, he had pushed his way into it doggedly, uncertain what to do first, but he was there. One by one his audience had become conscious of it, and were confronting him startled and uncertain, too. Young Chester Gaynor elbowed his way to the front, but stopped there, grinning at the invader, restrained perhaps by a lady's voice, which was to be heard admonishing him excitedly.

"Don't you get hurt, dear."

"How did he get here? Why can't somebody get him out?" other excited ladies inquired.

"Get Judge Saxon," directed Mr. J. Cleveland Kent's calm and authoritative voice.

"Get Sebastian. Where is the fellow? Is he afraid?" demanded the Honourable Joe from the extreme rear. Some one laughed hysterically. It was Mrs. Burr. The laugh was quickly hushed, but the new guest had heard it, though no other sound seemed to have impressed him. He laughed, too, a dry, broken ghost of a laugh, as cracked and strange as his voice, which he now found abruptly.

"Lillie," he called. "Hello, Lillie dear."

Mrs. Burr was not heard to reply to this affectionate greeting, but he hardly paused for a reply. His light, high, curiously detached sounding voice talked on with a kind of uncanny fluency.

"Lillie," he urged cordially, "I heard you. I know you're there. Come out and let's have a look at you. I don't see anything of you lately. You're too grand for me. I don't care. I'm in love with a prettier girl. But you used to treat me all right, Lillie dear, and I treated you right, too. I never told. A gentleman don't tell. And you were straight with me. You never double-crossed me, like you and the dago Sebastian do to Everard. Everard! That's who I want to talk to. Where is he?"

At the mention of the name his wavering gaze had steadied and concentrated suddenly on the centre of the group in the garden, and now, while

he looked, the crowd parted. Pushing his way through, the Colonel faced his uninvited guest.

The great man was not at his best. His most ardent admirer could hardly have claimed it. He had pulled the muffling scarf down from his eyes, but was still tearing at the knot impatiently. Mrs. Kent had come fluttering ineffectively after him, catching at his arm. He struck her hands away, and pushed her back, addressing her with a lack of ceremony which outsiders were not often permitted to hear him employ toward a member of his favoured circle.

"Keep out of this, Edith, and you keep quiet, Lil. You girls make me sick," he snapped. "Half the trouble in this town comes because you can't learn to hold your tongues. You'd better learn. You're going to pay for it if you don't, and don't you lose sight of that. Well, Brady, what does this mean? What can I do for you?"

The ring of authority was in his voice again, as if he had called it back by sheer will power. He had stepped forward alone, and stood looking up at his guest, still framed in the sheltering trellis, and his blurred eyes cleared and grew keen as he looked, regarding him indifferently, like some refractory but mildly amusing animal. His guest's defiant eyes avoided his, and the ineffective, swaying figure seemed to shrink and droop and grow

smaller, but it was a dignified figure still and a dangerous one. There was the snarling menace of impotent but inevitable rebellion about it, of men who fight on with their backs against the wall; a menace that was not new born to-night, but the gradual growth of years, just the number of years that the Colonel had spent in Green River.

"I'm sorry, sir," stammered his guest.

"Then apologize and get out."

"I can't."

"I think you'll find you can, Brady."

"I can't. I've got to ask you a few questions."

They seemed to be slow in framing themselves. There was a little pause, the kind of pause that for no apparent reason deprives you for the moment of any desire to move or speak. The unassuming figure of the young man under the trellis stood still, swaying only slightly from side to side. A deprecating smile appeared on his lips, as if his errand were distasteful to him and he wished to apologize for it. Gradually the smile faded and the eyes grew steady again and unnaturally bright. He held himself stiffly erect where he stood for a moment, took a few lurching steps forward, paused, and then plunged suddenly across the garden toward Colonel Everard.

It would have been hard to tell which came first, the little, stumbling run forward, the Colonel's

instinctive move to check it, the stampede of the devotees of the time-honoured game of blind-man's buff, acting now with a promptness and spontaneity which they had not displayed in that game, Lillian Burr's hysterical scream, the snarling words from the Colonel that silenced it, or the quick flash of metal. It had all happened at once. But now, in an amphitheatre of scared faces, as far behind as the limits of the garden enclosure would allow, Mr. Brady and his host stood facing each other alone, and the Colonel, now entirely himself, with the high colour fading out of his cheeks, was looking with cool and unwavering eyes straight into the barrel of Mr. Brady's revolver.

It was a clumsy, old-fashioned little weapon. Brady's thin hand grasped it firmly, as if some stronger hand than his own were steadying his. He laughed an ineffective laugh, like a boastful boy's, but there was a threat in it, too.

"What have you got to say for yourself? I'll give you a chance to say it," he stated magnanimously, "but you shan't say a word against her. She was always a good girl. She is a good girl. What have you done with her? Where is she?"

"You don't make yourself altogether clear, Brady," said the Colonel smoothly.

"Where's Maggie?"

"Maggie?" The Colonel's eyes swept the circle

of his guests deliberately, as if to assure himself that no lady of that name was among them.

"Maggie. You know the name well enough." The sound of it seemed to give the lady's champion new courage; it flamed in his eyes, hot, and quick to burn itself out, but while it lasted, even a gentleman who had learned to face drawn revolvers as indifferently as the Colonel might do well to be afraid of him. "Maggie's missing. I'm going to find her. That's all I want of you. I won't ask you who's worked on her and made a fool of her. I won't ask you how far she's been going. But I want her back before the whole town knows. I want to find her and find her quick. She's a good girl and a decent girl. She's going to keep her good name. She's coming home."

"Commendable," said the Colonel, not quite smoothly enough. His guest was past listening to him.

"Maggie. That's all I want. You're getting off easy. Luck's with you. I've stood a lot from you, the same as the town has. It will stand a lot more, and I will. Get Maggie back. Get her back and give her to me and leave her alone, and I'll eat out of your hand and starve when you don't feed me, the same as the rest"—he came two wavering steps nearer, and dropped his voice to a dry quaver meant to be confidential, a grotesque

and sinister parody of a confidence—"the rest, that don't know what I know."

"What do you mean?"

"I won't tell. Don't be afraid. A gentleman don't tell, and there's nobody that can but me. Young Neil don't know. The luck's with you, sir, just the same as it always was."

"I've had enough of this. Get home, Brady," cried the Colonel, in a voice that was suddenly wavering and high, like an old man's, but his guest only smiled and nodded wisely, beginning to sway as he stood, but still gripping the clumsy revolver tight.

"Just the same as it was when old Neil Donovan died."

"Get home," shrilled the Colonel again, but his guest pursued the tenor of his thoughts untroubled, still with the look of an amiably disposed fellow-conspirator on his weak face, a maddening look, even if his words conveyed no sting of their own.

"Neil Donovan," he crooned, "my father's own half-brother, and a good uncle to me, and a gentleman, too. He sold rum over a counter, but he was a gentleman, for he didn't talk too much. A gentleman don't tell."

But the catalogue of his uncle's perfections, whether in place here or not, was to proceed no further. The audience pressed closer, as eager to

look on at a fight as it was to keep out of one. There was a new and surprising development in this one. The two men had closed with each other, and it was not the half-crazed boy who had made the attack, but the Colonel himself.

It was a sudden and awkward attack, and there was something stranger about it still. The Colonel was angry. He had tried to knock the weapon out of the boy's hand, failed, and tried instinctively, still, to get possession of it, but he was not making an adequate and necessary attempt to disarm him, he was no longer adequate or calm. He was angry, suddenly angry with the poor specimen of humanity that was making its futile attempt at protest and rebellion, as if it were an equal and an enemy. His face was distorted and his eyes were dull and unseeing. His breath came in panting gasps, and he made inarticulate little sounds in his throat. He struck furious and badly directed blows.

It was a curious thing to see, in the heart of the great man's admiring circle, at the climax of his most successful party of the year. It did not last long. The two struggling figures broke away from each other, and the boy staggered backward and stood with the revolver still in his hand. He was a little sobered by the struggle, and a little weakened by it, pale and dangerous, with a fanatic

light in his eyes. Some one who had an eye for danger signals, if the Colonel had not, had made his unobtrusive way forward, and joined him now. He was not the most formidable looking of allies, but he stood beside them as if he had a right to be there, and the Colonel turned to him as if he recognized it.

"Hugh, you heard what he said?" he appealed; "you heard?"

"Judge, you keep out of this," Brady called, "keep out, sir."

Judge Saxon, keeping a casual hand on his most prominent client's arm, stood regarding Mr. Brady with mild and friendly blue eyes. He had quite his usual air of being detached from his surroundings, but benevolently interested in them.

"Charlie," he said, as if he were recognizing Mr. Brady for the first time at this critical moment, and deriving pleasure from it. "Why, Charlie," his voice became gently reproachful, but remained friendly, too. "Everard, this boy don't mean a word he says," he went on, with conviction, "he's excited and you're excited, too. This is a pretty poor time for you to get excited, Everard."

"You're right, Hugh," muttered the Judge's most prominent client thickly; "you're right. Get him away. Get him home."

"He's a good boy," pronounced the Judge.

It was not the obvious description of Mr. Brady just at that moment. There was only friendly amusement in the Judge's drawling voice and shrewd eyes, but back of it, unmistakably there, was something that made every careless word worth listening to. Mr. Brady was resisting it. His face worked pitifully.

"Judge, I told you to keep out. I don't want to hurt you."

"Thanks, Charlie."

"Every word I say is God's truth, Judge."

The Judge did not contradict this sweeping statement. He was studying Mr. Brady's weapon with some interest. "Your uncle's," he commented, pleased. "Why, I didn't know you still owned that thing, Charlie."

"I want Maggie. I want——"

"I'll tell you what you want," offered the Judge, amicably, "you want to hand that thing to me, and go home."

Mr. Brady received this suggestion in silence, a silence which left his audience uncertain how deeply he resented it. Indeed, they were painfully uncertain, and showed it. Bits of advice reached the Judge's ears, contradictory, though much of it sound, but he took no notice of it. He only smiled his patient and wistful smile and waited, like a man who knew what would happen next.

"Hand it to me," he repeated gently.

"I won't, Judge." Mr. Brady's weapon wavered, and then steadied itself. His thin body trembled. The fanatic light in his eyes blazed bright. The excitement which had gripped him, too keen to last long, reached its climax now in one last burst of hysterical speech.

"He's a liar and a thief," he asserted, uncontradicted. He was not to be contradicted. There was a dignity of its own about the hysterical indictment, grotesque as it was, an unforgettable suggestion of truth. "He's a thief and a murderer, too. I don't have to tell what I know. Everybody knows. You all know, all of you, and you don't dare to tell. He's murdering the town."

The high, screaming voice broke off abruptly. Mr. Brady, still with the echo of his big words in his ears and apparently dazed by it, stood looking blankly into the Judge's steady and friendly eyes.

"I can't—I won't——" he stammered.

"Hand it to me," said the Judge, as if no interruption had occurred. For a moment the boy before him looked too dull and dazed to obey or to hear. Then, as suddenly as if some unseen hand had struck it out of his, the revolver dropped to the ground, and he collapsed, sobbing heartbrokenly, into the Judge's arms.

He was a heroic figure no longer. The alien

forces that made him one had deserted him abruptly, and he looked unworthy of their support already, only an inconsiderable creature of jangled nerves and hysterical speech, which would be discredited if you looked at him, even if it still echoed in your ears. The Judge, holding him and quieting him, looked allied with him, humble and discredited, too. The relieved audience hung back for a moment, taking in the full force of the picture, before it broke ranks to crowd round the Colonel and offer him belated support. The Colonel said a few inaudible words to Judge Saxon, and then turned from him and his protégé with the air of washing his hands of the whole affair. He looked surprisingly unruffled by it, even stimulated by it. The interruption to his party was over.

It ended as it had begun, the most successful party of the year. Mr. Brady's invasion was not the first unscheduled event which had enlivened a party at the Birches. There was more open and general speculation about the fact that the Randalls left immediately after, did not linger over their good-nights, and were obviously not permitted by their host to do so.

Mrs. Randall, leaning back in her corner with her hand tight in Harry's, and her long-lashed eyes, that were like Judith's, tightly shut, showed

the full strain of the evening in her pale face. She was a woman who did not look tired easily, but she was also a woman who could not afford to look tired.

There was no appeal or charm about her pale face now, only a naked look of hardness and strain. Her husband, staring straight ahead of him with troubled eyes, and his weak, boyish mouth set in a hard, worried line, spoke rapidly and disconnectedly not of Judith, or the Colonel's ominous coldness to him, but of Mr. Brady.

"Maggie's a bad lot," he was explaining for approximately the fifth time as they whirled into the drive and under their own dark windows. "She always was. Everard isn't making away with the belle of Paddy Lane. Not yet. He's not that far down. But that dope about old Neil Donovan——"

"Oh, Harry, hush," his wife said, "here we are. What do you care about Brady?"

"Nothing," he whispered, his arm tightening round her as he lifted her down. "I don't care about anything in the world but Judith."

"Neither do I. Not really," she said in a hurried, shaken voice that was not like her own, "you believe that, don't you, Harry?"

He did not answer. Gathering up her skirts, she followed him silently to the front of the house,

single file along the narrow boardwalk, not yet taken up for the summer, creaking loudly under their feet.

"Look," she whispered, catching at his arm. The front of the house was dark except for two lights, a flickering lamp that was being carried nearer to them through the hall, and a soft, shaded light that showed at a bedroom window. The window was Judith's. He fumbled for his key, but the door opened before them. Norah, her forbidding face more militant than ever in the flickering light of the kerosene hand-lamp she held, her white pompadour belligerently erect, and her brown eyes maliciously alight, peered at them across the door chain, and then gingerly admitted them.

"It's a sweet time of night to be coming home to the only child you've got," she commented, "why do you take the trouble to come home at all?"

It was a characteristic greeting from her. If it had not been, Mrs. Randall would not have resented it now. She clutched at the old woman's unresponsive shoulder.

"Where is she?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Judith is it you mean?"

"Oh, yes."

"How should I know how she spends her even-

ings? At some of the girls' to-night. Rena Drew's maybe. I don't know. It's a new thing for you to care. She was late in, and it's no wonder I was worried. She's like my own to me. But she needs her sleep now. You'd better go softly upstairs."

"Do you mean she's here?"

"What is it to you?" Norah, one bony hand clutching the newel post as if it were a negotiable weapon of defense, and her brown eyes flashing as if she were capable of using any weapon for Judith, barred the way up the stairs.

"I tell you, she needs her sleep, poor lamb—poor lamb," she said, "and you're not to go near her to-night. You're to promise me that. But she's here fast enough. My lamb is safe at home in her own bed."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ON AN afternoon in June a year later than the interrupted party at the Everards' a young man sat at Mr. Theodore Burr's desk in Judge Saxon's outer office. It was still technically Mr. Burr's desk, but the young man looked entirely at home there. A litter of papers which that fastidious gentleman would never have permitted himself now covered it, and the air was faintly scented with the smoke of a cigarette widely popular in Green River, but not with devotees of twenty-five-cent cigars, like Mr. Burr. The bulky volume open on the desk was thumbed and used as Mr. Burr had never used any book that looked or was so heavy. The book was Thayer on Constitutional Law, and the young man dividing his attention between it and Main Street under his window flooded with June sunshine was Neil Donovan.

He divided his attention unequally, as Main Street late on that sunny afternoon might persuade the most studious of young men to do. The square was crowded—crowded, it is true, much as a busy street on the stage is crowded, where the

same overworked set of supers pass and repass. The group of bareheaded girls now pacing slowly by arm in arm under the window were returning from what was approximately their fourth visit that afternoon to the post-office, the ice-cream parlours, the new gift shop and tea-room, or some kindred attraction. The Nashes' new touring car, driven by the prettiest girl in Willard's June house party, under the devoted instruction of Willard himself, was whirling through the shopping district for at least the third time.

However, it was an imposing pageant enough, though the boy at the window did not appear to find it so, regarding it with approving but grave eyes, and returning Mr. Nash's flourishing salute unsmilingly—a brave pageant of gay and flimsy gowns, of youth returning to the town, and movement and colour, and June fairly begun.

June so far was like other Junes in Green River. Colonel Everard and the season of social and political intrigues were here. Rallies in the town hall would soon begin. Men with big names in state politics would make speeches there, while the Colonel presided with his usual self-effacing charm, which did not advertise the known fact that he was a bigger power in the state than any of them. The good old question of prohibition was the chief issue, as usual; discreet representatives of the

people would, according to a catch phrase at the capital, vote for prohibition, and then go round to the best hotel and get drunk; and discreet politicians, like the Colonel, would make money out of both these facts in their own way.

Behind the closed door of Judge Saxon's office low-keyed, monotonous voices were talking, and a secret conference was going on. Troubled times were here again for those deep in the Colonel's councils. They were never sure of a permanent place there, but always on the watch for one of his sudden changes of front, which threatened not only his enemies but his friends. But he had recovered and held their confidence before, and he could this year.

All scandals of the year before were decently hidden. Maggie Brady was missing and continued to be missing. By this time it was the general verdict that she had always been bound to come to a bad end, and Charlie Brady to drink himself to death. Nobody interrupted his attempts to do so. His drunken outburst of speech had echoed a growing sentiment in the town, but it grew slowly, for under its thin veneer of sophistication Green River was only a New England town still, conservative and slow to change.

Green River had not changed much in a year, but Neil Donovan's fortunes had. Nobody

knew the full history of the change except Neil, but others could have thrown sidelights upon it, among them Mrs. Randall's second maid, Mollie. On the morning after that same party of the Colonel's, which Mr. Brady attended so unexpectedly, and Judith did not attend, Mollie opened the Randalls' door to an early caller.

Even in curl papers, she was usually too much for the young man now on the doorstep. He was in the habit of looking at his boots and addressing them instead of her, and Mollie quite understood that, for they were shabby boots. They looked shabbier than ever to-day, and so did his shiny coat, but his eyes were steady and clear, and there was clear colour in his cheeks, as if he had had the only restful and well-earned sleep in Green River.

"Miss Judith," he said.

"Not at home," said Mollie, in a manner successfully copied from French maids in the ten, twenty, thirties.

"Nonsense. Her curtains aren't up," replied the young man who was usually made speechless by it.

"She's asleep," conceded Mollie, in a manner more colloquial but also more forbidding. "She don't want to see you."

Mollie was incapable of interpreting Judith's wishes, but the young man was not; his smile

conveyed this, though it was friendly enough. "When Miss Judith gets up, tell her——"

"I tell you she don't want to see you," snapped Mollie in a tone any French maid would have deplored. "She don't want to see anybody."

"Tell her that I'll call again at three this afternoon," directed the young man calmly, and completed his disturbing effect upon Mollie by turning and walking briskly away without a backward glance, and without his usual air of self-consciousness when her eyes were upon him. He carried his shabby coat with an air, and held his head high, and swung out of sight down the sleepy little street as if he were the only wide-awake thing in the whole sunny, sleepy town.

It was a disconcerting moment for Mollie or any lady properly conscious of her power, and sorry to see a sign of it disappear, even the humblest of signs. It would still have been disconcerting, if she could have foreseen that Judith would not receive this young man alone, either at three that afternoon, or for many afternoons. The young man was not overawed by Mollie. That was established once and for all. He would never be overawed by her again. She slammed the door rather viciously.

"Keep quiet there," said Norah, appearing inopportunely, as her habit was, with a heavily

laden breakfast tray. "She needs her rest. But she's awake. She rang. You can take this up and leave it outside her door. Who was talking to you?"

"Well, I don't know what's come to him," Mollie complained. "Who does he think he is? Did anybody leave him a fortune over night? It was the Donovan boy."

A few minutes after Neil's encounter with Mollie, when Mr. Theodore Burr admitted him listlessly after his third knock at Judge Saxon's door, he could see no evidence that any one had left the Donovan boy a fortune over night, but did note a change in him. There was something appealingly grave and sedate about his face, as if a part of its youth, the freakish, unconquerable laughter of it, that had defied and antagonized Mr. Burr, were gone forever, burned away, somehow, in a night. It was a look Mr. Burr was to grow well used to in the next few months. Perhaps the unaccountable affection he was to feel for the boy in the course of them was born then and there.

Neil emerged from the Judge's private office after a briefer talk than usual, and the Judge did not escort him to the door in his accustomed, friendly fashion. Mr. Burr did, and made him clumsy and unwonted confidences there.

"The old man's not quite fit to-day," he said.

"I ought to have told you. It's a poor time to get anything out of him. Been shut up there by himself doping out something. Won't say two words to me."

"Then he must be in a bad way, Theodore," said the boy, with the ghost of his old, mocking smile, which Mr. Burr somehow did not find annoying at all.

"Look here, Neil," he surprised himself by saying, "I like you. I always did. You deserve a square deal. You're too good for the Brady gang. You're too good for the town. If there was anything I could do for you——"

"Maybe there is, Theodore," the boy turned in the corridor to say. "Cheer up. You'll have a chance to see. I'm coming to work for the Judge. I start in next week."

"But the Judge turned you down." Mr. Burr's brain struggled with the problem, thinking out loud for the sake of greater clearness, but too evidently not achieving it. "The Judge likes you, too, but he couldn't take you in if he wanted to. He talked of it, but gave it up. He'd be afraid to. Everard——"

"I start in next week," repeated Mr. Donovan.

"But what did you say to him?" demanded Mr. Burr. "What did he say to you? How did you dare to ask him again?"

"I didn't ask him. Don't worry, Theodore. I haven't been trying any black magic on the Judge. I don't know any. Maybe I'll learn some. I'm going to learn a good deal. I've got to. Nobody knows how much. Even the Judge don't know. I'm coming to work for the Judge, that's all, but I didn't ask him." Mr. Burr, listening incredulously, did not know that this was a faithful if condensed account of his talk with the Judge and more, the key to much that was to happen to this pale and determined young man, the secret of all his success. He gave it away openly, and without pride:

"I just told him so."

Neil started in the next week. If Mr. Burr watched his young associate somewhat jealously at first in the natural belief that a boy who had changed the course of his life in a five-minute interview would do something equally spectacular next, and if the Judge, who had said to him at last, "Well, it's my bad morning, son, and your good morning, so you get your way, but you're climbing on a sinking ship, and remember I told you so. And I'll tell you something else. It will be poor pickings here for all of us, and I'm sorry, but I'm the sorriest for you," was inclined to follow him furtively over the top of his spectacles with a look that held all the pathetic apology of age to youth

in his kind, near-sighted eyes, this was only at first.

Colonel Everard, returning a few weeks later from one of his sudden, unexplained absences from town, and making an early morning visit to his attorney, was admitted by a young man whom he recognized, but pretended not to.

"Who are you?" he inquired, "the office boy?"

"Just about that, sir," the young man admitted, as if he had no higher ambition, but the Judge, entering the room with more evidence of beginning the day with the strength that the day required, than he had been showing lately in his carriage and look, put a casual hand on the boy's shoulder, and kept it there.

"The last time we discussed enlarging my office force, you didn't advocate it, Everard," he said rather formally.

"So you aren't discussing it with me now?"

"Do you think you'd better discuss it?"

"Do you?"

"I think you are in no position to discuss it. You've been recently furnished with much more important material to discuss. I haven't seen you since your garden party, have I?"

"No." Both men seemed to have forgotten the boy's existence, but now the Colonel recalled it, and apparently without annoyance, and flashed

a disarming smile at him, giving up gracefully, as he always did if he was forced to give up at all. "Well, you're right, Hugh. You're always right. Do as you please. But this boy's got a temper of his own and—quite a flow of speech. Runs in his family, evidently. Properly handled, these are assets, but——"

"I'm sorry, sir," Neil found himself stammering. "I shouldn't have spoken to you as I did that day. I'm sorry."

"Next time be sure of your facts." The voice was friendly, almost paternal, but it held an insidious challenge, too, and for one betraying moment all the native antagonism that was really there flashed in the Colonel's eyes. Few enemies of his had been permitted to see it so clearly. It was a triumph for Neil, if a barren one. "Be very sure."

"I will, sir," said Neil deliberately, but very courteously. Then the Colonel disappeared into the private office with his arm about his trusted attorney's shoulders, and the young man for whose sake his attorney had openly defied him for the first time in years began to empty the office waste-baskets.

The winter weeks in the Judge's office passed without even moments of repressed drama like this. There was little to prove that they were the

most important weeks of his life to Neil. At first they were lonely weeks. Mr. Burr, unusually prompt, reached the office one crisp September morning in time to find him staring out of the window at a straggling procession passing on its way up the hill to the schoolhouse, hurrying on foot in excited groups, or crowded into equipages of varying sizes and degrees of elegance, properly theirs or pressed into service.

"First day of school," said Neil, and did not need to explain further, even to Mr. Burr. From to-day on new faces would look out of the many-paned windows of the old, white-painted building. New voices would sing in the night on their way home from barge rides and dances. There were to be new occupants of the seats of the mighty; a new crowd would own the town. The door of the country of the young was shut in this boy's face from to-day, and that is always a hard day, but it was peculiarly hard in Green River, where the country of the young was the only unspoiled and safe place to live. And there were signs of a private and more personal hurt in the boy's faraway eyes.

"What's that letter?" said Mr. Burr.

"Seed catalogue."

"Don't she write to you every day?"

"Who?"

"Is she too proud, or did she forget all about you? She'll have time to, away half the summer, and not coming home for vacations. She won't see you till next June."

"If you mean Judith Randall," her late classmate replied in a carefully expressionless voice, "why should she write to me, and why shouldn't she forget all about me?" There was a faint, reminiscent light in his eyes, as if he were not seriously threatened with the prospect, but it died away quickly, and his face grew very grave.

"I'm a business man now, Theodore."

"You are," said his newest friend, "and we couldn't keep house without you now. You're in a class by yourself."

This was true. Neil did not take his big chance at life as other boys equally in need of it would have done. He did not lose his head. He showed no pride in it. Green River, soon seeing this, rewarded him in various ways, each significant in its own fashion. Nondescript groups round the stove in his uncle's little store ceased to look for signs that he felt superior to them, and welcomed him as before, restoring to him his privilege of listening to talk that was more important than it seemed, public sentiment uncoloured and without reserve, the real voice of the town. Mrs. Saxon, of the old aristocracy of the

town, with inborn social prejudices stronger than any acquired from the Everards, broke all her rules and invited him to Sunday-night supper.

"The boy's not spoiled," his old friend Luther Ward said to the Judge approvingly. "He knows his place."

"That's the surest way to climb out of it," said Judge Saxon, advisedly, for it was the Judge who had the closest and most discerning eyes upon Neil Donovan's career. Listlessly at first, because he had looked on at too many uphill and losing fights against the world, but later with interest, forced from him almost against his will, he watched it grow.

To a casual observer the boy would have seemed to be fitting himself not for an ornament to the legal profession, but for the office boy Colonel Everard had called him, but he would have seemed a willing office boy. He spent hours uncomplainingly looking up obscure points of law for some purpose nobody explained to him. He devoted long, sunny afternoons to looking up titles connected with some mortgage loan which nobody gave him the details of, and he seemed satisfied with his occupation, and equally satisfied to devote a morning to plodding through new-fallen snow delivering invitations to some party of Mrs. Saxon's.

When he was actually studying, he lost himself in the Judge's out-of-date reference books, as if they contained some secret as vital as the elixir of youth, and might yield it at any moment. Mr. Burr, at first ridiculing pupil and course of instruction alike, and with some show of reason, began shamefacedly and afterward openly to give him what benefit he could from the more modern education which had been wasted upon him. Between his two teachers the boy arrived at conclusions of his own. Neil was studying law by the old method which evolved so many different men of letters and keen-witted lawyers, a method obsolete as the Judge's clothes, but Neil gave allegiance to it ardently, as if it had been invented for him.

"What do you get out of this?" the Judge demanded, coming upon Neil late one afternoon, poring over the uninspired pages of Mr. Thayer by the fading light. "What do you hope to get?"

"All there is in it," said the boy simply, and without oratorical intent.

"Suppose you do pass your bar examinations. What then? What will you do with it?"

"I'll wait and see then. I had to begin somewhere."

"Why?" said the Judge, and as he asked the question, the answer to it, which he had once

known so well and forgotten, looked at him in the boy's pale face and glowing eyes, the great answer not to be silenced, youth, and the wonderful, wasteful urge of youth. "Don't you know this town's sick?" he demanded abruptly. "It's dirty. You can't clean it up. Don't you ever try. Don't you stir things up. Don't you dig in too deep. I suppose you know the town's got no room for you?"

"Yes, sir, I know."

"Where do you expect to end?" the Judge began irritably, "in the poorhouse? You're so damn young," he grumbled. "It's a good thing I didn't know you when I was young. I'd have listened to you then."

"You will now, sir," said the boy, and the Judge did not contradict him, but instead, under shy pretence of groping for the switch of the desk lamp, found the boy's hand and gripped it.

"You're a good boy," he remarked irrelevantly. "Mind what I said, and don't dig in too deep."

The Judge did not explain whose secrets he hoped to protect by this vague warning. Probably he could not have explained. It was one of those instinctive pronouncements which shape themselves in rare moments when two people are close and mean more than either of them know. Certainly if the key to any secret was to be found

within the Judge's dingily decorated walls or in his battered safe, or learned from his partner, the boy had exceptional opportunities to unearth it. Theodore Burr's intimacy with Neil developed rapidly. He stuck to it obstinately, in spite of his wife, showing more independence about it than he had in years. The two had tramped and snowshoed together through long winter hours of intimate talk and more intimate silence, and they found the first Mayflowers of the year together. Only the week before he had committed the crowning indiscretion of giving up a poker game at the Everards' to go shooting with Neil.

The Judge, in the strenuous days of Colonel Everard's summer campaign, had no time to observe the growth of this intimacy or to think much about Neil, but he might have been interested in a snatch of talk in the Brady kitchen one evening, if he could have overheard it, more interested than Mrs. Donovan, who did not remember it long.

Her son was an hour late for supper, but she was used to that, for now that he was on his feet the house revolved around him. She served him, and then sat watching him with her hands folded, and the new dignity that had come with his first bit of success straightening her tired shoulders, and the look of age and pain that had been grow-

ing there since Maggie disappeared widening her soft, deep eyes. He had dropped wearily into his chair, and he ate almost in silence, but she was used to that, too.

Outside the short, June twilight was over, and a pattering summer rain had begun to fall. Neil's dark hair was damp with it and clung to his forehead in close curls. Once, passing his chair, she smoothed it with a hand that was work hardened but finely made and could touch him lightly and shyly still. Her son pulled her suddenly close, and hid his face against her.

"What is it?" she asked, softly and not too soon as she stood still and held him. "What's wrong, then? Where have you been?"

"Nothing's wrong. Nothing new. I went round to Theodore Burr's, but I left there at five. I didn't mean to be late home or make work. But I had a hunch to look in at Halloran's. I thought I'd find Charlie there. I did, and I had to get him home."

"Taking your strength," said Mr. Brady's aunt, unfeelingly but truthfully, "a good-for-nothing——"

"That's not the worst thing he does."

"What is, then?"

"Talking."

"He don't mean anything by that."

"Sometimes he does. Sometimes he tells you things that you never suspected and you don't believe him at first, but you find they're true; things that have been locked up in his addled brain so long that they're out of date, and you don't know how to profit by them or handle them, but they're true—all true."

"Neil, you don't half know what you're saying. You're tired."

Mrs. Donovan released herself abruptly to get the tea-pot from the stove. Her son, who had been talking in a low, monotonous voice, more to himself than her, watched her with dazed eyes that slowly cleared.

"I guess you're right," he said. "I didn't mean to frighten you. Charlie was no more loose mouthed to-day than he always is. I got hold of nothing new, but I have hold of more than I can handle, and I'm tired and I'm scared, and there's only one of me."

But Mrs. Donovan preferred her own interpretation of the situation, as most ladies would have. She made it tactfully, keeping her eyes away from him, busy with the tea-pot. "You're young, and it's June. Neil, the children walked round with the Sullivan girl to take home the wash to the Randalls'. They had some talk with Norah there. Judith will be home this week."

She had mentioned the much-debated name in a voice which she kept indifferent, but she flashed a quick, apprehensive glance at him. She was quite unprepared for its effect upon him. He only laughed, and then his face sobered quickly, and his eyes grew lonely and tired again.

"Judith," he said, "you think that's my trouble, mother. Well, I'm not so young as I was last June." Then he began with considerable relish to drink his tea.

"You're contrary and close mouthed, but you're only a boy like all other boys," said Mrs. Donovan, sticking to her point, "and you're a good son to me."

The boy who had made this rare and abortive attempt at confidences only the night before showed no need of repeating it as he gazed out of the Judge's window. He looked quite competent to bear all his own troubles alone, and a generous share of other people's, though somewhat saddened by them. Perhaps his mother's diagnosis of him was correct. He leaned his chin on his hands and stared out of the window like any dreaming boy, as if it was. But the winter that had passed so lightly over Green River had left traces of its own upon him. His profile had a clearer, more sharply outlined look. The lines at the corners of his mouth were firmer though

they were no deeper, and the mouth was still a boy's mouth, red-lipped and lightly closed. But the dreaming eyes were a man's, dreaming still, but alert, and ready to banish dreams.

The afternoon light was fading fast. It was not so easy now to read the fine print of Mr. Thayer's notes, and the boy made no further pretence of trying to. He let Mr. Thayer slip to the floor, and stretched himself in his chair with a sigh of relief. The sounds of talk in the Judge's room had grown fainter and more intermittent and finally ceased. The Judge, still deep in conference with them, had left with his guests by the private door. The boy was alone in the office.

Gradually, as he sat there, the bright pageant of the busy little street had dimmed. It made a softer and mellower picture, a blend of delicate colours in the slant mellow light, and it was not so busy now. There were fewer passers-by, and they hurried and did not loiter past. It was almost supper-time. Willard Nash, not joy riding now, but dispatched reluctantly alone on some emergency errand, flashed by in his car, and disappeared up Main Street.

Beyond the double row of shops the upper section of the street was empty. The maples, in full leaf now and delicately green, shadowed the upward

slant of smooth road alluringly. Touched with golden afternoon light, and half hidden by the spreading green, the old, solidly built houses planted so heavily in the midst of their well-kept lawns had new and unguessed possibilities. Any one of them just then might have sheltered a fairy princess. The one that did was just within range of the boy's grave, patient eyes, a protruding porch, disproportionately enlarged and ugly, a sweep of vividly green lawn stripped bare of the graceful, dishevelled growth of lilac and syringa bushes that had graced it before Mrs. Randall's day.

Not from that house, but from somewhere beyond it, a car flashed into view and cut smoothly and quickly down through the street, almost deserted now. The boy followed it idly with his eyes. The low-built, graceful lines of it held them. It approached, and slowed down directly under the windows, and the boy leaned forward and looked.

It was stopping there. It was one of the Everard cars, as the trim lines and perfection of detail would have shown without the English chauffeur's familiar, supercilious face. The car had only one occupant, a slender young person in white. She slipped quickly out, and disappeared into the dingy entrance hall below.

She had not seen the boy at the window. He stood still now in his corner, and waited. The tap of her feet was light even on the old creaking stairs, but he heard. She knocked once and a second time, and then threw open the door impatiently, saw who was there, and stopped just inside the door, and looked at him.

Her white dress and big, beflowered hat looked as cool and as new as June itself. They did not make the dingy room look dingier, they made you forget it was dingy. Her soft, befrilled skirts fluffed and flared in the brave and bewildering mode of the moment. Skirts, small shoes that were built to dance, not to walk, the futuristic blend of flowers in her hat, and the girdle, unrelentingly high and futuristic of colour, too, that gave her waist an unbelievably slender look, were all in the dainty and sophisticated taste of a sophisticated young lady, and under the elaborate hat there was a sophisticated young face. It looked smaller and more faintly pink. The small chin was more prominent. But she still had the wide, reproachful eyes of a child. They regarded the boy unwinkingly. One hand went behind her, found the knob of the door, and closed it mechanically, but the eyes did not leave his face.

He stepped uncertainly forward, and stopped.

"Well, Judith," he said, in a voice that held all

the authority Judge Saxon's assistant had acquired in the long year of his service and more, "Well?" and then, in a voice that held no authority at all, but was suddenly husky and small: "Oh, Judith, won't you speak to me?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

JUDITH," Neil said.

Neil's visitor flashed a quick glance round the dim office, empty except for the lean young figure that confronted her. It was a hunted glance, as if she really meant to turn without speaking and pick up her beruffled skirts, and run away down the dusty stairs, but she did not run away. Suddenly quite herself, recovering by tapping some emergency reserve of strength as only ladies can, but as most of them can, even the most amateurish and beruffled of ladies, she crossed the room to him.

She came deliberately, with an impressive flutter of hidden silk. She was smiling a faint half-smile, sweet but indefinably teasing, and holding out a daintily gloved hand. It touched Neil's lightly and impersonally, not like a girl's warm hand at all, but like the hand of a society forever beyond his reach, held out patronizingly to this boy beyond its pale, only to emphasize the distance between them.

"How do you do?" she murmured, formally but sweetly.

"How do you do?" the boy stammered. "Judith, oh, Judith, I——"

He broke off, staring helplessly into her eyes. They were dark and accusing and grave, and a heartache shadowed the depths of them, the lonely and infinite heartache of youth, when you cannot measure your pain or argue it away, but must suffer and suffer instead. But the boy was too miserable just then to read it there.

"Judith," he began, "don't you care any more? Why wouldn't you read my letters? Why wouldn't you let me explain? Won't you let me now? I can, Judith."

Still smiling, not taking the trouble to interrupt him, she waited for him to finish, and as she waited and smiled, he had suddenly nothing more to say. Judith was so slender and white and still as she stood there. All the outraged dignity of an offended schoolgirl was helping to make this overwhelming little effect of hers, and every trick of poise and carriage that she had acquired in a year, and something else, something that shamed and silenced the boy as no tricks could have done, and made her pathetic little show of injured dignity real. A woman's shy soul was reaching out for every defence it had to protect itself; a woman's new-born, bewildered soul looked out of Judith's beautiful, grieved eyes.

It was very still in the office. Outside an automobile horn sounded aggressively, once and again, and Judith gave the boy an amused, apologetic glance.

"Parks is in a hurry," she said. "He ought not to do that. The Colonel wouldn't like it. But I won't keep him waiting. I'm going out to the Camp for supper. Father and mother are there already. I stopped for the Judge, but he doesn't seem to be here. He is walking out to the Camp, I suppose. I'm—glad to have seen you." Her voice choked perilously over this irreproachable sentiment, then steadied and modulated itself according to the instructions of the highly accredited elocution teacher of which she had enjoyed the benefit for a year. "Good-night."

Again she put out her cool little hand, but this time the boy's hand closed on it tight.

"Judith," he began, his words coming fast, the contact seeming to release all that had been storing itself up in his lonely heart for a year. Once released, it came tumbling out incoherently, with the lilting brogue of the ragged little boy that he used to be singing through it, and the breathless catch in his voice that is the supremest eloquence for the kind of words that he had to say. But Judith gave no sign of being moved by it, and while she listened, a hard look, too unrelenting

for any eloquence to reach, was growing in her eyes.

"Judith, you're so sweet, so sweet; sweeter than you were last year—sweeter than you ever were before. I didn't know anybody could be sweeter, even you. I was so lonely. I wanted you so, and now you've come. Everything will be all right, now you've come. And you came straight here. You knew I was here, and you came because you knew. You came straight to me."

"I came for the Judge," she corrected him gravely.

"But you knew I was here."

"I knew you were working for the Judge, but I didn't think you'd be here so late in the afternoon. I didn't come to see you. I didn't want to. Why should I? But I'm glad you are doing so well. Good-night, Neil."

"Good-night," he muttered mechanically, checked once more in spite of himself.

But as he spoke, he felt her hands, both in his now, and held tight, tremble and try softly at first, and then in sudden panic, to pull themselves away. Her voice, that had been so grave and cool, with no echo of the excitement that was in his, failed her now, though she kept her wide-open eyes bravely upon him. She was afraid of him, this young lady who was making such elaborate at-

tempts to hide it, this young lady not of his world, and so anxious to prove it to him, this calm stranger with Judith's eyes. She was very much afraid, and she could not hide it any longer.

"Let me go," she tried to say.

"Judith," he dropped her hands obediently, but his arms reached out for her and caught her and held her close, "you didn't come for the Judge. You came to see me."

"No. No."

Her face was hidden against his shoulder. Her voice came muffled and soft. Neil paid no further attention to it. "No," it insisted faintly. "Let me go." Then it insisted no more, and the boy laughed a soft, triumphant little laugh.

"You did come to see me, and you love me. You love me and I love you. You were angry, of course. Of course you sent back my letters. But you're going to listen to me now. You're going to let me explain. I couldn't that night. I couldn't talk any more. I didn't dare. I had to keep hold of myself. I had to get you home. And I did, dear. I turned round and took you home, and I got you home—safe. You're going to listen? And not be angry any more? You won't, will you? You won't—dear?"

Her face was still out of sight, and her white figure was motionless in his arms. She did not

relax there, but she did not struggle. She looked very slender and helpless so. Her futuristic hat had slipped from its daring and effective adjustment, and fallen to the Judge's dusty floor, where it lay unregarded. The silvery blond head against his shoulder was changed like the rest of her, a mass of delicately adjusted puffs and curls, but in the fast-fading light he saw only the soft, pale colour of her hair and the tender curve of her throat. He kissed it reverently and lightly, once only, and then his arms let her go.

"You're so sweet," he whispered; "too sweet for me. But you're mine, aren't you? Tell me you are. And you forgive me for—everything? Tell me, Judith."

She seemed in no hurry to tell him. She faced him silently, her white dress whiter than ever in the fading light, and her face big eyed and expressionless. He waited reverently for her answer, and quite confidently, picking up the elaborate hat mechanically, and then smoothing the ribbons tenderly, and pulling at the flowers, as he realized what he held.

"Poor little hat," he said softly, with the brogue coaxing insinuatingly in his voice. "Poor little girl. I didn't mean to frighten you. And I didn't mean to—that night. . . . Judith!"

It was undoubtedly Judith who confronted him,

and no strange lady now. It was as if she had been waiting for some cue from him, and heard it, and sprung into life again, not the strange lady, not even the girl of the year before, but a long-ago Judith, the child who had come to his rescue on a forgotten May night, the child of the moonlit woods, with her shrill voice and flashing eyes. She was that Judith again, but grown to a woman, and now she was not his ally, but his enemy. She snatched the beflowered hat away, and swung it upon her head with the same reckless hand that had swept the lantern to the ground in her childish defence of him. Her eyes defied him.

"That night," she stormed, "that night. Don't you ever speak of that night to me again. I never want to hear you speak again. I never want to see you again. I'll never forgive you as long as I live. I hate you!"

"Judith, listen to me," begged the boy. "Listen. You must."

But the girl who swept past him and turned to confront him at the door was past listening to him. Words that she hardly heard herself, and would not remember, came to her, and she flung them at him in a breathless little burst of speech that hurt and was meant to hurt. The boy took it silently, not trying to interrupt, slow colour reddening his cheeks, his eyes growing angry then sullen. The

words that Judith used hardly mattered. They were futile and childish words, but because of the blaze of anger behind them, that had been gathering long and would go on after they were forgotten, they were splendid, too.

"I hate you! I don't belong to you. I don't belong to anybody. I'm not like anybody else. Nobody cares what I do, and I don't care. I don't care. Nobody ever takes care of me or knows when I need it. Well, I can take care of myself. I'm going to now. I never want to belong to anybody. If I did, it wouldn't be you."

"Judith, stop! You'll be sorry for this."

"If I am, it's no business of yours. It's nobody's business but mine."

"You'll be sorry," the boy muttered again, and this time the girl did not contradict him or answer. Her shrill little burst of defiance was over, and with it the sullen resentment that had crimsoned the boy's face as he listened began to die away. He was rebuffed and thrown back upon himself. His heart would not open so easily again. It would be a long time before it opened at all. But he did not resent this. He only looked baffled and puzzled and miserable, and the girl staring mutely at him from the doorway with big, starved eyes, looked miserable, too. She would be angry again. All the hurt pride and

anger that had been gathering in her heart for a year was not to be relieved by an unrehearsed burst of speech. It had been sleeping in her heart. It was all awake now, and she would be angrier with the boy and the world than ever before, angrier and more reckless. But just now her anger was blotted out and she was only miserable. In the gloom of the office there was something curiously alike about the two tragic young faces.

The two were alone together there, but they had never been farther apart. There was a whole world between them, a lonely world, where people all speak different languages, and understand each other only by a miracle, and most of them are so used to being alone that they forget they once had a moment of first realizing it. But when it was upon them, it was a bitter moment. These two young creatures were both living through it now. They looked at each other blankly, all antagonism gone.

"You won't listen?" said the boy wonderingly, admitting defeat. "You won't forgive me?'

"No," said Judith pitifully. "I can't."

Neil looked at her forlornly, but did not contest this. He came meekly forward, not trying to touch her again, and opened the door for her.

"Well, good-night," he said. "Good-night, dear."

"Good-bye," Judith said. "Good-bye, Neil."

Then, jerking her flaunting hat into adjustment with trembling fingers, and shaking out her befrilled skirts with a poor little imitation of her earlier airs and graces, she slipped out into the corridor, groped for the dusty stair rail, and clutched at it with a new disregard for her immaculate whiteness, and disappeared down the stairs.

In the street below the last of the afternoon light still lingered, reflected from the polished windows of the bank building, and faintly illuminating the half-deserted square, but the sun was just going down behind the court-house roof, a big, crimson ball of vanishing light. Judith, appearing below in the doorway, stood regarding it deliberately for a minute, ignoring the chauffeur's discreet manifestations of impatience, and then made herself comfortable deliberately in the Colonel's car.

She sat there proudly erect, a dainty, aloof little lady. She seemed to have recovered her high estate upon entering it, and become a princess beyond Neil's reach once more. Watching her gravely from the Judge's window, he could not see the angry tears in her eyes or the reckless light in them.

Little preliminary pants and puffs came from the car, discreetly impatient, as if they voiced all

the feelings that the correct Parks repressed. He relieved them with one blatant flourish of sound from the horn, and swung the car grandly across the square, round the corner, and out of sight. Judith was gone, and she had not once looked up at the boy in the window.

She had not even seen another cavalier, who dashed out of a shop and tried to intercept and speak to her, but was just too late; Mr. Willard Nash, thrilled by his first sight of her, ready to return to his old allegiance at a word, and advertising the fact in every line of his forlorn fat figure as he stood alone on the sidewalk gazing wistfully after the vanished car.

The boy at the window did not waste his time in this way. Judith was gone, and with her the spell that had held him mute and helpless, and he was a man of affairs once more. He was not a very cheerful man of affairs to-night. He was not singing or whistling to himself, as he usually did, but he moved competently enough about the room, entering the Judge's private office with its smell of stale tobacco smoke and group of chairs, so confidentially close that they looked capable of carrying on the conference their late occupants had begun without help from them. He rearranged this room, giving just the straightening touches to the jumble of papers on the desk that

the Judge permitted, and no more, and putting the outer office in order, too.

By his own desk he paused, fingering Mr. Thayer's thumbed pages absently. He had no attention to spare for them just then, or for the graver questions that had absorbed him just before Judith came. They would soon claim him again. They awaited him now, but out in the gathering dark that he watched from the darkening office something else waited, too.

His heart ached with it, but it beat harder and stronger for it, and new strength to meet old issues came pulsing from it, as if he were awake again after a year of sleep. He was grieved and miserable, but he was awake. For his mother was right: he was only a boy like other boys; he was young and it was June, and whether she was kind or unkind, Judith Randall was back in Green River.

Judith, whirled along the fast-darkening road between close-growing pines, dulling from green to black, and birches, silver against them, looked for the welcoming lights of Camp Everard through a mist of angry tears.

She shed them decorously, even under cover of the dark; she was still a dainty and proud little lady, with nothing about her to advertise con-

spicuously that she was crying, or why. But her little gloved hands were closing and unclosing themselves, her lips were trembling in spite of her, and there was a hunted look in her eyes as she turned them toward the dark woods, as if her quarrel with Neil were not her only trouble. The tears that she controlled so gallantly were a protest against a world only half understood and full of enemies whose alien presence she was just beginning to feel.

But Neil, as she had just seen him, was enough to occupy the mind of such a young lady, or a much older one. The look in his eyes as he stood holding open the Judge's door for her was a highly irritating one for any lady to meet. He was older and wiser than she was, no matter what she could say or do to hurt him; he was stronger than she was, and patiently waiting to prove it to her; that was what Neil's eyes were saying.

They said it first when he left her at her own door without a good-night on that strange May night a year ago; when she stood looking up at him changed and alien and silent, with the May moon behind him, that had brought her bad fortune instead of good, still dim and alluring with false promises above the shadowy elms in the little street, and they looked down at her just so—Neil's grave, unforgettable, conquering eyes.

They were eyes that followed you to-night, when you tried to forget them and look at the dark woods and fields; eyes that looked at you still when you closed your own.

But Judith would not look at them. The eyes were lying to her. Neil was not really wise or kind. He was cruel. He had hurt her and slighted her, and she was through with him.

"Parks, can't you go faster?" she said suddenly, in her clear little voice. "It's so late, and I'm hungry and cold."

"It's bad going through here, Miss," the chauffeur said.

They were turning into a narrow mile or so of road that sloped gradually down through a series of arbitrary curves and bends to the lake and the camp, a changed and elaborate structure now, overweighted with verandas and uncompromisingly lit with new electric lights. But the road was one of the things that the Colonel did not improve when he changed the public camp into a private one. It was unchanged and unspoiled, a mysterious wood road still, alluring now in the gloom.

Judith's own people were waiting for her there at the end of that road. They were all the people she had. Willard and schooltime and playtime were more than a year behind her; they were be-

hind her forever. She could never go back to them. She had never really been part of them. She had forced herself into a place there, but she had lost it now, and it could never be hers again.

These were her people. They were strange to her still, but she had grown up breathing the feverish air that they breathed, and with little whispers of hidden scandal about her. Judith was alone between two worlds: one was closed to her, and she was before the door of another, where she did not know her way. She was really alone, as she had told Neil, more alone than she knew; a lonely and tragic figure, white and small in the corner of the big car.

But she was not crying now. She dabbed expertly at her eyes with an overscented scrap of handkerchief and sat up, looking eagerly down the dark road. She could catch far echoes of a song through the still night air, faint echoes only, but it was a song that she knew, a gay little song, and it came from a place where people were always kind and gay. It was like a hand stretched out to her through the dark, a warm hand, to beckon her nearer, and then draw her close. She leaned forward and listened and looked.

There was the camp, the first glimpse of it, though soon a dip of the road would hide it again. It was an enchanting glimpse, a far, low-lying

flicker of light. And there, just by the big, upstanding boulder where the road turned abruptly, she saw something else. She saw it before Parks did, as if she had been watching for it. It was a man's figure that started forward, came to the edge of the road, and waited. The man looked more than his slender height in the shadow, but his light, quick walk was unmistakable. It was Colonel Everard.

"Stop, Parks," Judith said, with new authority in her voice.

He stood waiting for her silently, without any greeting at all, and she slipped her hand into his and stepped out and stood beside him.

"Go on," he said to the chauffeur. "It's too rough here for the car. It's easier on foot. Miss Randall will walk with me."

The car, skilfully manipulated along the steep, zigzag road, but a clumsy thing at best here in the woods, and an artificial and ugly thing, lumbered away, breaking through outreaching branches. Judith watched it out of sight. Then and not till then she turned to her host.

"Aren't you going to speak to me?" the great man inquired respectfully, as if her intentions deserved the most serious consideration.

"Yes," said Judith serenely, unflattered by it.

"What are you going to say?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"I want you to shake hands with me."

A hand touched his lightly. It drew quickly away, but it was a confiding little hand.

"You don't seem surprised to see me."

"I'm not," said Judith.

"But you're glad to see me?"

"Yes."

"It's stuffy inside, and they've got a fire in the billiard room and won't leave it. I wanted——"

Judith laughed and let him draw her hand through his arm as they began to grope their way down the road. "You wanted to meet me."

She made the correction triumphantly and confidently, as she would have made it to Willard. All this was coquetry, as she and Willard understood it, and it was an old game to her, and a childish game, but there was something strangely exciting about the fact that the Colonel understood it, too, and condescended to play at it. It was more exciting than usual to-night.

"Why should I want to meet you?" he said.

"I don't know."

"Why weren't you downstairs last night when I came to see your father?"

"I was tired."

"You weren't running away from me?"

"No."

"And you won't ever run away from me?"

"I don't know."

"You're afraid of me."

"Am I?"

"Aren't you?"

"I don't know," said Judith. "Look, there's the moon."

It was low above the trees, rising solemn and round and slow. It looked reproachful and grave, like Neil's eyes. It was looking straight at Judith. Judith turned her eyes sternly away. What was the Colonel saying? Something that did not sound like Willard at all, or like the Colonel, either. Nobody had ever spoken to her in just that voice before. It was a choked, queer voice. But Judith smiled up at him and listened, tightening the clasp of her hand on his arm.

"Don't be afraid of me. Don't ever be afraid. . . . You're so sweet to-night."

"No, I won't," said Judith defiantly, straight to the round, accusing moon. "I won't be afraid."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"I DON'T like the look of you," said Mrs. Donovan.

"Then you're hard to please," Neil turned at the foot of the steps to say, trying to smile as he said it. "Harder than I am. I do like the look of you."

The Donovans, mother and son, were both quite sufficiently attractive to the eye at that moment. This was the second day of September, and also the second day of the county fair in Madison, five miles away—the big day of the fair, and Neil's uncle had been up at dawn to escort the younger Bradys there in a borrowed rig, and in the company of at least half Green River in equipages of varied style and state of repair. Neil had slept late, breakfasted sketchily, and dined elaborately alone with his mother. Now the long, still, sunny afternoon was half over, and she stood in the kitchen door, watching him start for town.

The kitchen, newly painted this year, looked empty and unnaturally neat behind her, but friendly and lived in, too, with the old, creaking rocker pulled to an inviting angle at the window

overlooking the marsh, and a sofa under the other window, its worn upholstery covered freshly with turkey-red; one splash of clear colour, sketched in boldly, just in the corner where it satisfied the eye. Her neighbours did not take this humble fabric seriously for decorative purposes; indeed, they would not have permitted a sofa in the kitchen at all, but her neighbours were not of her gracious race. They could not wear a plain and necessary white apron like the completing touch to a correct toilette assumed deliberately. Mrs. Donovan could, and she did to-day. Also her brown hair, dulled to a softer, more indefinite brown by its sprinkling of white, rippled softly about her low forehead, and her dress was faded to a tender, vague blue like the blue of her eyes. Her eyes, almost on a level with Neil's as she stood on the step above him, had the charm that was peculiarly their own to-day, cloudy as they were with the faraway look of a race that believes in fairies, but warm and human, too, with an intimate mother look of concern for Neil.

Neil met it steadily, not a sullen boy as he would have been under that questioning a year ago, not resenting it at all, but keeping his secrets deliberately. It had always been hard for her to make him answer questions. It was not even easy for her to ask them now.

"You don't sleep," she began.

"Neither do you, if you've been catching me at it," reasoned her son correctly.

"You work too hard." She had made an accusation that he could not deny, so he only smiled his quick, flashing smile. "You won't even take a day to yourself."

"I'll have the office and most of the town to myself this afternoon. I'll have to go. I've got something special to look into."

"Where's Charlie?" she demanded at once.

"Oh, he's not troubling me to-day. He's safe at Madison with his new mare. He'll break loose there, then come home and repent and stay straight for weeks and make no trouble for me. He's due to break loose. He's been good too long—too good to be true. He was in fine form last night." Mr. Charlie Brady's cousin grinned reminiscently.

"What do you mean?'

"He gave me quite a little side talk on good form in dress and diction. Charlie claims I won't make an orator, and he don't like my taste in ties."

"Who does he think he is?" flashed Mr. Brady's aunt indignantly.

"Who do you think he is?" her son inquired unexpectedly. "For whatever you think, that's me. I'm no better than Charlie."

"Charlie?" Mrs. Donovan gasped, and then plunged into an indignant defence of her son, not pausing to take breath.

"You?" she began. "You that's planted firm on the ladder and right-hand to the Judge already, and him getting older every day, and Theodore Burr just kept on in the office because Everard's after Burr's wife. So he is, and the town knows it, and Theodore'll wake up to it soon. A fine partner Theodore is for the Judge, poor boy, but he's a good boy, too, though none too strong in the head; Lil Burr is a good girl, too, and she'd make a good wife to Theodore if she could be left to herself. She'd make it up with Theodore, as many a girl has done that's got more for her husband to forgive than Lil.

"Poor Lil. Her head's high above me now, but the time was she cried on my shoulder; crying for Charlie, she was, before ever Charlie took up with Maggie and Lil with Theodore; when the four of them were all young together, and the one as good as the other. Young they were, and the hearts of them young—wild, doubtful hearts. Many's the time Lil would come to me then, here in this same kitchen, and go down on her knees, her that was tall and a fine figure of a girl, and cling onto me, crying her heart out; crying she was for all the world like—like——"

Mrs. Donovan checked herself abruptly with shrewd eyes upon her son.

"Like young things do cry, and tell you their troubles in tears, not words." She ended somewhat vaguely, and came quickly back to her main subject again.

"You that can walk into the big rally next week and sit with the men that count, and whisper and talk to them, and hold your head high, with nothing against you, and will be sitting up on the platform soon, with the best of them, and be mayor yet, like Everard's going to be, or governor, maybe —you to compare yourself with Charlie, if he is my half-sister's own son. He's a drunken good-for-nothing. He's got no spirit in him if he'll stay here at all, where he's ashamed himself and make a show of himself. How is it he's able to stay? Where does he get the money he spends? This town don't pay it to him. Who does?"

"What put that into your head?" her son asked sharply.

"There's talk enough of it, and there'll be more. The whole town will be asking soon."

"The town asks a lot of questions it don't dare hear the answers to," said Neil softly, unregarded. His mother returned to her grievance:

"You to be likening yourself to Charlie."

"When Charlie was twenty-five," Neil began

slowly, "he was where I will be then, or better. The Judge was a friend to him, too, and the Judge was a better friend then to have. Charlie was setting up for himself, well thought of. My own father trusted him. When I was a boy and not grown, Charlie was a son to him, and more. He was a better spoken lawyer than I'll ever make, quick and smooth with his tongue, and he was fine appearing, and put up a better front than I do. I've gone part of the road that Charlie went. What will stop me from going the whole road? What's beat Charlie is strong enough to beat me. . . . Don't look so scared, mother. I don't want to scare you. I only want you to be fair to Charlie."

"His heart's broke," she conceded, melting. "He's nothing with Maggie gone."

"His heart's broke, but that's not what beat him," her son stated with authority. "He was beat before."

"When?"

"He was beat," Neil stated deliberately, "when Everard moved to Green River."

This was a sweeping statement, but Neil did not qualify it. He dropped the subject and stood silent, turning absent eyes upon the green expanse of marshy field that had been the starting-place of all his dreams when he was a dream-struck,

gazing boy. His mother's eyes followed his, growing cloudier and soft as if even now she could read them there.

"Rests your eyes," Neil said, after a minute; "looks pretty, too, in the sun. It's a pretty green. We'll drain it, perhaps, by the time I'm mayor or governor. It might pay. I'll be going now."

"Neil, when did you see her last?" asked his mother suddenly.

"See who?" he muttered, and then flushed, and straightened himself, and met her eyes bravely.

"I saw Judith yesterday," he said, "on Main Street, and—she cut me."

"Did she walk past you?"

"No, she wouldn't do that. She pretended not to see me, but she saw me, all right. She passed me in an automobile."

"Whose?"

"One of Everard's."

"Was he with her?"

"Yes."

"Neil," his mother began a little breathlessly, "I want to tell you something. I've said hard things to you, and they weren't deserved. I know it now, and I'm sorry. I want to take them all back. I've said hard things about Judith Randall."

She hurried on, afraid of being stopped, but he made no move to stop her. He listened courteously, his face not changing.

"Neil, she's not what I thought. There's no harm in her. There's no pride in her. She's just lonesome. She's just a young, young girl. She's sweet-spoken and sweet-faced. Neil, from all I hear——"

"You didn't hear all this direct from—Judith, then?"

"Judith?" she hesitated, flashing a questioning glance at him. "Is it likely? How would I get the chance? But from all I hear, she's too good for Everard and the like. And she's not safe with them. She needs——"

"What?" interrupted her son gravely, with the air of seeking information on a subject quite strange to him and rather distasteful. But she tried to go on.

"—Judith needs—any one that's fond of her, any one that she's fond of, to be good to her now. I've seen her, and it's in the eyes of her. No man ever knows just what a woman is grieving for, but that's all one if he'll comfort her when she's grieving. She needs——"

Neil's eyes were expressionless. She sighed and put her two hands on his shoulders. "Have it your own way," she said. "I'll say no more."

Neil caught at one of the hands on his shoulders and kissed it.

"For one thing," he said, "Judith or any girl needs a mother with a heart in her—like I've got, but you're the one in the world. I'm going."

But he did not go at once. Standing beside her, suddenly awkward and shy, he first gave her the confidence that she could not force from him, all in one generous breathless burst of words.

"Mother, Charlie's not the only one with his heart broke. But heart-break isn't the worst thing I've got to bear. There's something else. I can't tell you. I'd rather bear it alone. I've got to. Good-bye."

Then he left her standing still in the door, shading her cloudy blue eyes with one small hand and looking after him. He swung into the dusty road and, keeping his head high and his eyes straight ahead, undazzled by the sharp sunlight of mid-afternoon on the long stretch of unshaded way, passed out of sight toward Green River.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

NEIL turned into Post-office Square just on the stroke of four. The square was as empty and strange to the eye as his mother's kitchen, though this was the rush hour of the day in that business centre upon ordinary days, when the fair had not emptied the town.

A solitary Ford of prehistoric make stood before the post-office, and even that was just cranking up. It lurched dispiritedly off, leaving a cloud of dust behind. A dejected-looking group of children hung about the door of the ice-cream parlour, and appeared to lack the initiative to enter in. Half the shops were shut. In the big show-window of the central section of Ward's Emporium Luther Ward, usually on parade and magnificently in charge of his shop and his staff of employees at this time of day, stood in his shirt sleeves, embracing an abnormally slender lady in a mauve velveteen tailored suit.

At first glance he seemed to be instructing her in the latest dance steps, but on a nearer view the visible part of her proved to be wax, and the suit was ticketed nineteen-fifty. He jerked her into

place, turned and saw Neil, and hailed him cheerfully, waving him round to the main entrance door, where he joined him, still wiping his brow.

"If you want a thing well done, do it yourself," he said, explaining his late exertions with the air of believing the explanation was original with him and did credit to his intellect. "What are you here for, brother? Isn't Madison good enough for you?"

"No," Neil said. "Not with the big race called off."

"Called off? How's that?"

"Because you weren't there, Luther."

Mr. Ward gave a gratified laugh at this graceful compliment, and descended to facts.

"I'm too old for horse racing. It's my boy's turn. He went over with Willard Nash's crowd to-day. Why didn't you?" Mr. Ward demanded severely.

"Oh, Willard asked me all right. He's quite strong for me now." Mr. Ward had doubted this, being on the watch for slights to Neil and resenting them, though he never made an effort to prevent them. This was the usual attitude of Neil's more influential friends.

"Willard's a shrimp," said Mr. Ward gruffly. "And I like you," he added in a burst of frankness. "I always did like you, Neil. You've pulled

yourself up by your boot-straps, and I hope you hang on to them tight. There's nobody better pleased than I am. Oh, I got a rig and sent all the help from the store over to the fair to-day," he added, turning quickly to impersonal subjects.

"You always do treat them right."

"Well, this wasn't my idea. I got it from the Colonel." A look of harmless but plainly evident pride came into Mr. Ward's open and ruddy countenance as he mentioned the great man's name. It was only the week before that he had received his first dinner invitation from the Everards. It came at the eleventh hour and did not include his wife, but he was dazzled by it still. "You know what he's doing? Closing his house, practically, for all three days of the fair, and sending all the help on the place over there—two touring cars full. It's a fine thing for them. They're high-class help and don't have it any too interesting down here. Anybody that says he's not democratic don't know the Colonel. This town don't half know him yet."

"You're right," Neil put in softly.

"Democratic," declaimed Mr. Ward, "and public spirited. Look at the fountain he's going to put up in the square. Look at the old Grant house going to be fitted up for a library. Look at him running for mayor, when he's been turning

down chances at bigger offices for years—willing to stay here and serve for the good of the town. There's talk against him more than ever this year. I know that. It amounts to an indignation meeting when the boys get together at Halloran's. Well, failures hate a successful man, and their talk don't count. It will die down. But I hate to hear of it. For the Colonel's put this town on the map. He's not perfect, but who is? And suppose he does have a good time his own way? We've got a right to—all of us. It's a free country."

Mr. Ward delivered this last sentiment with touching faith in its force and freshness, and waved a plump hand of invitation toward the little private office back of the main section of his store, where he had developed his unfailing eloquence of speech upon subjects of public interest, and liked best to practise it. But Neil, himself listened to with growing deference by the groups that forgathered there, was not to be lured to that sanctum to-day. Speaking hastily and vaguely of work to be done, he escaped from his good friend and across the street to Judge Saxon's office.

He climbed the stairs heavily, and did not linger before the door to picture the sign changed to "Saxon, Burr, and Donovan," as he had done more times than he cared to admit. The office

was not a thing to be proud of as a step up in life for him to-day; it was a place to be alone in, as men feel alone and safe in the place that is their own because they have worked there.

Showing this in every move, Neil locked the door, threw off his cap, and dropped into the broken-springed chair at the desk that was nominally Theodore Burr's, but really his. He groped mechanically for the handle of the drawer where he usually rested his feet, found it hard to open, gave up the attempt and, leaning back without its support, stared at Mr. Burr's ornate, brass-mounted blotter with unseeing eyes.

Sitting there, he was no longer the boy who had the privilege of intimate talk with prominent citizens like Mr. Ward and valued it; or the boy who had laughed at his mother's anxiety so bravely. He was not even the boy that he used to be, sullen, but rebellious, too. To-day for the first time he was something worse, a defeated boy. The long minutes dragged like hours, and he sat through them as he would have sat through hours, silent and motionless, losing run of time and acknowledging defeat.

For there was something that this boy wanted, and had always wanted, as he could never want other things, even success or love, as a boy or a man can want one thing only in one lifetime. It

was a remote and preposterous dream that he had, a dream that nobody else in Green River was foolhardy enough to cherish long, but this boy belonged to the race of poets and dreamers, the race that must sometimes dream true, because it always dreams. His dream had taken different forms: sometimes he saw himself doing desperate things, setting fire to a house that he knew and hated, striking a blow in the dark for which nobody thanked him, but the issue was always the same, and the dream never left him. He was to find Green River a new master. He was to save the town. That was his dream. It had never left him till now.

He was only a lean, tense boy, crouched over a battered desk and staring out of the window at a country street with absent, beautiful eyes, but he was living through a tragic hour; the terrible hour that poets and dreamers know when they lose hold upon their dreams. Measured by minutes, this hour was not long. Neil passed a hand across his forehead and sat up, reaching for his cap in a dazed way, for he was not to be permitted to hide longer from his trouble here. The plump and personable figure of Mr. Theodore Burr was crossing the square and disappearing into the door below. His unhurried step climbed the stairs. Neil opened the door to him.

"Hello, stranger. Why aren't you at Madison?" Neil said.

"I didn't go," said Mr. Burr lucidly. "Where are you going? I don't want to drive you away from here."

"Oh, just out. I was going anyway."

"You don't invite me. I don't blame you. I'm poor company, and I've got business to attend to here."

"No!"

"Why shouldn't I have business here?" snapped Mr. Burr.

"You should, you should, Theodore. Say"—the question had been troubling Neil subconsciously all the time he sat at the desk—"what's wrong with that lower drawer? I can't open it."

"It's locked."

"What for?"

"That," said Mr. Burr with dignity, "is my private drawer—for private papers."

"Papers!" Mr. Burr's private papers were known to consist chiefly of a file of receipted bills and a larger file of unreceipted bills, both kept with his usual fastidious neatness. "What papers?"

"That's my business. I've got some rights here, if I am a figurehead. I've got some privileges."

"Sure. Don't you feel right to-day, Theodore?"

"That," said Mr. Burr, "is my business, too."

Neil stared at his friend. Mr. Burr was faultlessly groomed, as always, his tie was of the vivid and unique blue that he affected so often, and a very recent close shave had acted upon him as usual, giving him a pink and new-born appearance, but his eyes looked old and tired, as if he had not slept for weeks and had no immediate prospect of sleeping, and there were lines of strain about his weak mouth. He was not himself. Even a boy preoccupied with his own troubles could not ignore it.

"Don't you feel right?" Neil said. "Don't you want me to do something, Theodore?"

"Yes. Get out of here. Leave me alone," Mr. Burr snapped angrily.

"Sure," said Neil soothingly.

Suddenly Mr. Burr gripped Neil's reluctant, shy, boy's hand, kept it in his for a minute in silence, and then abruptly let it go, pushing Neil toward the door.

"Don't begrudge me one locked drawer when you'll own the whole place some day," he said, with all the dignity that his fretful burst of irritation had lacked. "I'd like to see that day. You're a good boy, Donovan."

"You're not right. You've got a grouch.

Come with me and walk it off," Neil said uneasily, but he did not press the invitation, and his friend had little more to say. His silence was perhaps the most unusual thing about his behaviour, which was all out of key to-day. Neil remembered afterward that just as he closed the door upon Mr. Burr and his vagaries, shutting them at the same time out of his mind, Mr. Burr, sitting rather heavily down in the broken-springed desk chair, was bending and stretching out a faultlessly manicured, slightly unsteady hand toward the locked drawer of the desk.

Neil stepped out into the street with a cautious eye upon the Emporium across the way, but no portly form was in sight there now, and no hearty voice hailed him. He crossed the square and turned north, walking quickly, soon leaving the larger houses behind, and then the smaller houses above the railroad track, always climbing gradually as he walked. Finally, at the entrance to an overgrown road that led off to his left, and at the highest point of his long and slow ascent, he turned and looked back at the town.

The town that Colonel Everard had put on the map hardly deserved the honour, seen so in a glitter of afternoon light, with the long, sloping hill leading down to it, and the white tower of the church pointing high above it, a cozy huddle of

houses at the foot of the hill. It looked unassuming and sheltered and safe, only a group of homes to make a simple and sheltered home in. The boy looked long at it, then turned abruptly and plunged into the road before him.

It led straight across a shallow belt of fields and deep into the woods. Only a cart-track at first, it soon lost itself here in a path, and the path in turn grew fainter and became a brown, alluring ghost of a path. It was hard to trace, but this was ground that Neil knew, a favourite haunt of his, though few other boys ventured to trespass here. The woods were part of the Everard estate.

Neil had found his first May flowers here on the first spring that he was privileged to give them to Judith. Last year she had helped him look for them here. His errand here was not so pleasant to-day. The brown path did not really lead to the heart of the woods as it seemed to. It was not so long as it looked. It was a fairly direct short cut to the Everard house.

The boy followed it quickly, with no eyes for the dim lure of the woods to-day.

"You've beat me," he muttered once to himself; "I'll have a look at you."

Soon the woods were not so thick. They fell away around him, carelessly thinned at first, littered with fallen trees and stumps, but nearer

the house combed out accurately by the relentless processes of landscape gardening, and looking orderly and empty. The little path vanished entirely here. Ahead of Neil, through a thin fringe of trees, was the Colonel's rose garden; beyond it, the broad stretch of lawn and the house, bulky and towered and tall.

Neil broke through the trees and stood and looked at it, straight ahead, seen through the frame of the trellised entrance to the garden, upstanding and ugly and arrogant.

"You've beat me," he said to the Colonel's house. "You've beat me; you and him. I hate you!"

His voice had a hollow sound in the empty garden. Garden and lawn and house had the same look that the whole deserted town had caught to-day; the look of suddenly empty rooms where much life has been, a breathless strangeness that holds echoes of what has happened there, and even hints of what is to happen; haunted rooms. It is not best to linger there. Neil turned uneasily toward the path again.

He turned, then he turned back, stood for a tense minute listening, then broke through the rose garden and began to run across the lawn. Very faint and small, so that he could not tell whether it was in a man's voice or a woman's, but

echoing clearly across the deserted garden, he had heard a scream from the house.

It came from the house somewhere, though as Neil ran toward it the house still looked tenantless. The veranda was without its usual gay litter of cushions and books and serving trays. At the long windows that opened on it all the curtains were close drawn—or at all but one.

As Neil reached the house he saw that the middle window was thrown high and the long, pale-coloured curtain was dragged from its rod and dangling over the sill. Just then he heard a second scream from the house. It was so choked and faint that he barely heard it. Neil ran up the steps and slipped through the open window into the Everards' library.

Little light came through the curtained windows. The green room, sparsely scattered with furniture in summer covers of light chintz that glimmered pale and forbidding, looked twice its unfriendly length in the gloom. There was a heavy, dead scent of too many flowers in the air. On a table across the room a bowl of hothouse hyacinths, just overturned, crushed the flowers with its weight and dripped water into the sodden rug.

Neil, at the window looking uncertainly into the half-dark room, saw the bowl and the white mass

of crushed flowers, and then something else, something that shifted and stirred in a far corner of the room. He saw it dimly at first, a dark, struggling group. There were two men in it.

One was a man who had screamed, but he was not screaming now. It would hardly have been convenient for him to scream, for the other, the smaller and slighter man of the two, was clutching him by the throat, gripping it with a hand that he could not shake off as the two figures swayed back and forth.

"Who's there?" Neil cried.

Nobody answered him. Nobody needed to, for just then the two men who seemed to be fighting swung into the narrow strip of light before the uncurtained window and he could see their faces. He could see, too, that they were not fighting now, though they had seemed to be. The bigger man was choked into submission already. No sound came from him and he hung limp and still in the little man's hold. Just in the centre of the strip of light the little man relaxed his grip, and let him fall. He dropped to the floor in a limp, untidy looking heap, and lay still there, with the light full on his face, closed eyes and grinning mouth. The man was Colonel Everard, the man who stood over him was Charlie Brady.

As Neil looked Brady dropped on his knees

beside the Colonel, felt for his heart, and found it. He knelt there, motionless, holding his hand pressed over it and peering intently into his face. Presently he got to his feet deliberately, gave a deep sigh of entire content with himself, and looked about him. Then and not until then he saw Neil. He saw him without surprise, if without much pleasure, it appeared.

"You're late," he remarked.

"You drunken fool," Neil began furiously, then stopped, staring at his cousin. Whatever the meaning of this exhibition was, Charlie was not drunk. The excitement that possessed him was excitement of some other kind. It possessed him entirely, though it was under control for the moment. His muscles twitched with it. His shoulders shifted restlessly. His hands closed and unclosed. His eyes were strangely lit, and there was an absent, exalted look about them. Whatever the excitement, it was strong—stronger than Charlie. Neil, his eyes now used to the half-light, could see no weapon in the room, dropped on the floor or discarded. Mr. Brady, normally a coward in his cups and out of them, had attacked his enemy with his bare hands.

"Charlie, what's got you?" Neil said. "What's come to you?"

"What's come to him, there?" Charlie said, in a

voice that was changed, too, and was as remote and as strange as his eyes, a low voice, with the deceptive, terrible calm of gathering hysteria about it.

"Look what's come to him," the voice went on. "Don't he deserve it, and worse? How did I find him to-day when I broke in through the window there? At his old tricks again. There was a woman with him in the library there, when he came out to me. He locked the door. She's there now. Neil, you'd better get away from here. I don't know what you're doing here, but you'd better go, and go quick."

He had given this advice indifferently. He made his next observation indifferently, too, with his furtive, absent eyes on the library door.

"I've killed him."

"What's got you? Are you crazy?"

"No—not now. You'd better go. I want to take a look in there first. The key's in the door."

"Charlie, come back here."

The note of command that he was used to responding to in his young cousin's voice reached and controlled Mr. Brady even now; he obeyed and swung round and stood still, looking at Neil. Neil's dark eyes, just above the level of his own, and so like them, were unrecognizable now. They were dull with anger, and they were angry with him.

"What's the matter?" he quavered. "What's the matter, Neil?"

Between the two cousins, as they stood facing each other, the Colonel lay ominously still. The cruel eyes did not open, and the distorted mouth did not change.

"Look! You can see for yourself. Feel his heart," Mr. Brady offered, but his cousin's dark, disconcerting eyes did not leave his face. "What's the matter, Neil? What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to make you talk out to me," Neil said. "You'll tell me what's got you, and why you did this, which will be the ruin of you and me, too, but first you'll tell me something else. You'll tell me what you've hid from me for a year, you who can tell me the truth when you're drunk and lie out of it when you're sober, till you've worn me out and I'm sick of trying to get the truth from you. I'll be getting it now too late, but I'll get it. Have you or have you not been living on this man's money?"

"Yes."

"Was it hush money?"

"Yes," Mr. Brady said. "Neil, I'll tell you everything. You've guessed most of it, but I'll tell you the rest. I can prove it. I can prove everything I know. I did take hush money. It

was dirty money, but I didn't care. I didn't care what happened. I didn't care till to-day."

"To-day?"

"I got—a letter."

"Go on," Neil said.

As he spoke Mr. Brady's face began suddenly to change, lighting again with that strange excitement which had gripped him, revived, and burning through its thin veneer of control. His eyes blazed with it, and his voice shook with it. He waved a trembling hand toward the library door. A sound had come from the library, the faintest of sounds, a low, frightened cry. It was like the ghost of a cry, but he heard. Neil heard it, too, and was at the door before him, trying to unlock it, fumbling with the key.

"She's there yet," Mr. Brady cried; "whoever she is. Well, she'll be the last of them. I had a letter, I tell you, a letter from Maggie. She's coming home, what's left of her—what he's left of her—Everard. I never thought he was to blame. I said he was, but I was talked out of it. If I'd thought so, if I'd suspected it, would I have touched a penny of his dirty money? But she's coming home. Maggie's coming home."

For the moment Neil was not concerned with the fact. Graver revelations might have passed over him unheeded. The key had turned at last.

Then Neil felt the door being pushed open from inside. He stepped back and waited. The door opened cautiously for an inch or two, then swung suddenly wide. Standing motionless, framed in the library door, was Judith.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE two cousins, Mr. Brady shocked into sudden silence, stood with Colonel Everard's unconscious body behind them, unregarded, like any other bulky and motionless shape in the dim room, and stared at the girl who had come from the locked library.

"Not you," Neil's voice said dully. "Not here."

But the girl was Judith.

Bare-headed, slender in soft-falling white, she stood in the library door with both hands behind her, clasping her big, limp hat by its flaring brim. Her lightly poised, blond head was fluffy with small, escaping curls, her clear-coloured cheeks were warmly flushed, and between her red, slightly parted lips her breath came too quickly, but softly, still. A sheer, torn ruffle trailed from her skirt. One rose-coloured bow hung from her girdle awry and crushed, and looked the softer for that, like a crumpled flower.

About her dress and her whole small self there was a drooping and crumpled look. It was the look of a child that has played too hard. Surely

the most incongruous and pathetic little figure that had ever appeared from a room where a distressed or designing lady was suspected of hiding, she stood and returned Neil's look, but there was blank panic in her eyes.

They turned from Neil to Mr. Brady, wild eyed and pale beside him, to the disordered room, and back to Neil again, with no change of expression at all. They were wide and dilated and dark, intent still on some picture that they held and could not let go. Judith came an uncertain step or two forward into the room, stiffly, as if she were walking in her sleep, and stood still.

"Neil, what did you come here for?" she said. "I'm glad you came."

Her voice was sweet and expressionless, like her eyes, and though she had called Neil by name, she looked at him as if she had never seen him before. One small hand reached out uncertainly, pulled at his sleeve, and then, as he made no move to take it, dropped again, and began to finger the big hat that she held, and pluck at the flowers on it, but her eyes did not leave his face.

"Will they stand for this?" Mr. Brady was demanding incoherently behind them, "as young as this? Will the town stand it? No. And they won't blame me now. They can't. It was coming to you—you——"

He was in the grip of his own troubles again, and breaking into little mutterings of hysterical speech, which he now addressed directly to Colonel Everard, standing over him and not seeming to feel the need of an answer. It was an uncanny proceeding. The girl and boy did not watch it. They were seeing only each other.

"Judith," Neil began stumblingly, "what were you doing there? What's frightened you so? What you heard out here? That's all that frightened you, isn't it? Isn't it? But what made you come here alone like this? Didn't you know—— Oh, Judith——"

He stopped and looked down at her, saying nothing, but his eyes were troubled and dark with questions that he did not dare to ask. There was no answer to them in Judith's eyes, only blank fear. As Neil looked, the fear in Judith's eyes was reflected in his, creeping into them and taking possession there.

"Oh, Judith," he whispered miserably. "Oh, Judith."

Judith seemed to have heard what he said to her from far away, and to be only faintly puzzled by it, not interested or touched. Her eyes kept their secrets under his questioning eyes. They defied him. She was not like his little lost sweetheart found again, but a stranger and an enemy,

one of the people he hated, people who intrigued and lied, but were out of his reach and above him, and were all his enemies.

The boy's world was upsetting. Nothing that had happened to him in that room or ever had happened to him before had shaken it like that minute of doubt that he lived through in silence, with the strain of it showing in his pale face, and Charlie's voice echoing half heard in his ears. He drew back from Judith slightly as they stood. He was trembling. Judith's face was a blur of white before his eyes, then he could not see it—and then, as suddenly as it had come, his black minute was over.

"Take me away. I don't want to stay where he is any more. Is he dead?" Judith said, and she slipped her hand into Neil's.

Judith's voice was as lifeless and strange as before, and the hand in his was cold, but it was Judith's own little clinging hand, and the boy's hand closed on it tight. He stood still, feeling it in his, and holding it as if the poor little cold hand could give him back all his strength again. He looked round him at the dim room and its motionless owner and Charlie as if he were seeing them clearly for the first time. He was not angry with Charlie any longer. He was not angry at all. He drew a deep, sobbing breath of relief, dropped

his dark head suddenly and awkwardly toward Judith's unresponsive hand and kissed it, and then very gently let it go.

"Judith, you're you," he said, "just you, no matter what happens, and nothing else matters; nothing in the world, as long as you are you."

Judith only smiled her faint half smile at him, as if she guessed that some crisis had come and passed, but did not greatly care.

"Take me away," she repeated patiently. "I thought there'd be other people here. He said so. But I've come here alone before, only he was different to-day. He was different."

"Don't tell me. I don't want to know. I won't ever ask you again. I never ought to have asked you. It's all right, dear. It's all right."

"I didn't know people were like that—anybody, ever. I just didn't know——"

"Don't, dear," said Neil sharply. The small, bewildered voice that held more wonder and pain than her words broke off, but her bewildered eyes still wondered and grieved. Neil's arms went out to her suddenly and drew her close, holding her gently, and hiding her small, pathetic face against his shoulder.

"Don't," he whispered. "I'll take care of you. I'm going to take care of you. Nobody's going to hurt you any more."

"Neil, I just didn't know. I didn't know."

"It's all right. I'm going to take you away. Just wait, dear. I'm going to take care of you."

He spoke to her softly, saying the same thing over and over, as if he were quieting a frightened child. She was quiet in his arms like a frightened and tired child in any arms held out to it. One arm had slipped round his neck and clung to him. She drew long choking breaths as if she were too tired to cry. Gradually they stopped, but the arm round his neck only clung tighter.

"Don't leave me," she whispered.

"No, I'm not going to. I'm going to take care of you. You know that, don't you, Judith?"

"Yes. Neil?"

"Yes, dear."

"Neil." Still in his arms, because she felt safe and protected there, Judith lifted her head and looked at him, and into her sweet, dazed eyes, full of a terror that she could not understand, came a faint flash of anger. This boy who held her so safe and comforted was her enemy, too. Long before the ugly accident of what had happened behind the library doors he had been her enemy, and he was her enemy now, though she needed his protection and took it. Their quarrel was not over.

"Neil, I don't forgive you. I'm never going to forgive you."

"All right, dear."

"And I hate you. You know that, don't you? I hate you."

"Yes, dear, I know it. We aren't going to talk about that now. Let me go."

Both arms were round him now. Judith let him draw them gently apart and down, and drew back from him. The anger was gone from her eyes. She watched him wide eyed and still, as children watch the incomprehensible activities of grownups, or devoted but jealous dogs watch them.

"Don't leave me," she said. "You're sweet to me." Then she gave a sharp, startled little cry.

"Neil," she begged, "don't touch him. I don't want you to touch him. What are you going to do?"

The light had not had time to dim or shift perceptibly in Colonel Everard's big room while so much was settling itself for Neil and Judith. The Colonel still lay with the pale shaft of afternoon light on his unconscious face. Now the boy was kneeling beside him. He slipped a strong, careful arm under his shoulders, and bent over him, touching him with quick, sure hands. He ignored Mr. Brady, who stood crying out inco-

herent protests beside him, and finally put a shaking hand on his shoulder.

Neil shook it off, and rose and stood facing his cousin.

"I thought so," he said, with a short laugh. "You had me going at first, Charlie, when I came in here and saw what a pretty picture you made. I believed you. I thought you had killed him. I might have known things like that don't happen in Green River."

Neil put both hands on his cousin's shoulders and looked at him. Mr. Brady was not an attractive sight at that moment. The excitement that had held and swayed him was leaving him now, and he looked shaken and weak. An unhealthy colour purpled his cheeks, and his sullen eyes glared vindictively, but could not meet Neil's eyes.

"Don't laugh at me," he muttered. "Don't you dare to laugh at me."

"Going to beat me up, too?" his cousin inquired. "Poor old Charlie! Let's hope your friend there will laugh at you when he talks this over with you. He'll come out of this all right, but he'll be in a better temper if he has a doctor here. I'll 'phone for one."

"What do you mean? I've killed him. I'm glad I killed him. "

His cousin laughed again. "Killed him? The man's no more dead than you are. You've knocked him out, that's all. But you didn't kill him. Is that the 'phone over there?"

A desk telephone on a big Louis Quinze table at one end of the room, the instrument masked by the frilly skirts of a French mannequin, perhaps the only lady who had ever been permitted to be insipid in that room and to stay there long, answered Neil's question by ringing faintly, once and again. Neil started toward it, but did not reach it. Mr. Brady had flung himself suddenly upon him in a last burst of feverish strength, which he dissipated recklessly by shrieking out incoherent things, and striking misdirected blows.

Neil parried them easily, caught his thin arms and held them at his sides. Keeping them so, he forced him against the edge of the flimsy table and held him there and looked at him.

"You shan't answer that 'phone," Mr. Brady cried, in a last futile burst of defiance. "You shan't stop me. You shan't interfere. I'll kill him, I tell you, and you shan't answer that 'phone. You shan't——"

Mr. Brady's voice died away, and he was silent under his cousin's eyes.

"Through?" said Neil presently.

"Yes," he muttered.

"Do you mean it?"

Mr. Brady nodded sullenly.

"You've made a fool of yourself?"

Mr. Brady nodded again.

"Neil," he got out presently, "I can make it up to you. I haven't been square with you, but I can. I will. You don't know——"

"You've done talking enough. Will you go now?"

"Yes."

"You'll quiet down and go to mother's and stay there till I come?"

"Yes."

Neil let him go.

"Maybe I'll finish up your friend for you myself, Charlie, after you leave here," he offered. "I've thought of it often enough. Now I come here and fight for him instead of fighting against him. I fight with you. Poor old Charlie. Murder and sudden death! I tell you, things like that don't happen in Green River."

Neil stopped talking suddenly. The telephone at his elbow had rung again, this time with a sharp, sudden peal, peremptory as an impatient voice speaking. Neil caught it up, jerked off the simpering lady by her audacious hat, and answered.

At once, strangely intimate and near in that room where the three had been shut in for the last half hour alone and away from the rest of the world

while it went on as usual or faster, a man's voice spoke to him. It was almost unrecognizable, so excited and hoarse, but it was Luther Ward's.

"Hello," Neil said. "Hello. Yes, this is Everards'. No, he can't come to the 'phone. He—what? What's that?"

Neil stopped and listened breathlessly. Mr. Brady, slinking head down from the room, turned curiously to stare at him, and Judith, slipping across the room like a little white ghost, drew close to him and felt for his hand. Neil took her hand, this time with no response of heart or nerves. He had put down the telephone, replacing the receiver mechanically, but Luther Ward's voice still echoed in his ears.

It had spoken to an uncanny accompaniment of half-heard voices, rattling unintelligibly in the room where Ward was, the prosaic, tobacco-scented room that Neil knew so well.

"Tell Everard to come," Ward's voice had said. "He's to come down here, to Saxon's office. I'm there now. Theodore Burr has shot himself. yes, shot himself. He won't live through the night. Who's this talking to me? Neil Donovan, it's you. What are you doing at Everard's? Never mind. Come down here yourself. Come straight down. Theodore's conscious, and talking, and he's been asking for you."

CHAPTER TWENTY

GREEN RIVER was getting ready for the rally in Odd Fellows' Hall. It was six o'clock on the evening of the seventeenth of September, and "Grand rally, Odd Fellows' Hall, September Seventeenth at eight-thirty," had been featured for weeks in the Green River *Record*, on the list that with a somewhat arrogant suggestion of prophetic powers possessed by the *Record* was headed "Coming Events." It was always a scanty list, especially in the fall, when ten, twenty, thirty companies began to play larger centres, and church lawn parties and circuses could no longer appear on it. Sometimes not more than six events were to come in a gray and workaday world. But six were enough to announce. Even a true prophet is not expected to see all the future, only to see clearly all that he sees, and the *Record* did that.

This rally was important enough to be listed all by itself, and it did not need the adjective grand. It was The Rally.

It was Green River's own—a local, almost a family, affair. No out-of-town celebrities were

to be imported this time, to be listened to with awe and then wined and dined by the Colonel safe from the curious eyes of the town. This time old Joe Grant was to preside, as he had done as a matter of course on all such occasions when he was the acknowledged head of the town in political and financial matters, in the old days of high-sounding oratory and simpler politics that were gone forever, but were not very long ago. Judge Saxon, an old timer, too, and better loved than the Honourable Joe, had declined the honour of presiding, but had the authentic offer of it, his first distinction of the kind for years.

It was a local but very important occasion. It was Colonel Everard's first official appearance as candidate for mayor. It was to be a very modest appearance. No more time was allotted for his speech than for Luther Ward's. He was putting himself on a level with Luther and the Judge and the Honourable Joe and identifying himself at last with local politics. The evening emphasized the great man's condescension in accepting this humble office and honouring Green River. Even with the scandal of Theodore Burr's suicide unexplained still and only two weeks old, interest centred on the rally. It was a triumph for the town.

Green River was almost ready. Dugan's or-

chestra was engaged for the evening, instead of a rival organization from Wells, which the Colonel often imported upon private and public occasions. Jerry Dugan was getting old, too, like the Judge and the Honourable Joe. He had not lost the peculiar wail and lilt from his fiddling, but he had made few recent additions to his repertoire. Just now the band concert in front of Odd Fellows' Hall was winding up with his old favourite: "A Day on the Battlefield."

It had the old swing still, contagious as ever. Loafers in front of the hall shuffled their feet in time to it. Moon-struck young persons hanging two by two over the railings of the bridge to gaze at the water straightened themselves and listened. An ambitious soloist lounging against the court-house fence across the square began to whistle it with elaborate variations, at the inspiring moment when "morning in the forest" had bird-called and syncopated itself into silence, and actual fighting, and the martial music of the charge began.

High and lilting and shrill, it hung in the still night air, alive for the hour, challenging the echoes of dead tunes that lingered about the square, only to die away and be one with them at last; band music, old-fashioned band music, blatant and empty and splendid, clear through the still night air, attuned to the night and the town.

"Good old tune. Gets into your feet," Judge Saxon said, while his wife adjusted his tie before the black walnut mirror in their bedroom, but his unual tribute to the tune was perfunctory to-night, and his wife ignored it, wisely taking this moment of helpfulness to plunge him suddenly and briskly into a series of questions which she had been trying in vain for some time to get the correct answers to.

"Hugh," she said, "why wouldn't you take the chair to-night?"

"You were the only thing I ever tried to take away from Joe Grant and got away with it, Millie," the Judge explained gallantly.

"Don't you think this rally is like old times? Don't you want to see the town stand on its own feet again, instead of being run from outside?"

"I do, Millie."

Mrs. Saxon made her next point triumphantly, connecting it with the point before by some obscure logic known only to ladies.

"Hugh, a father could not do more for Lillian Burr than the Colonel has since poor Theodore went. The house full of flowers, calling there himself every day and twice a day, though she won't see him; but Lillian won't see any one. The Colonel's been ailing himself, too, but he wouldn't put off the rally and disappoint the town. And

the new library will open this fall, and there's talk that he's giving an organ to the church. Hugh, don't you think Theodore's death may have sobered him? Don't you think this may be the beginning of better things? Don't you think——"

"I think you're making a butterfly bow. I don't like them," said the Judge, with the ingenuous smile that somehow closed a subject. She sighed, but changed her attack.

"Turn round now. I want to brush you. Hugh, what has happened to Neil Donovan?"

"What do you mean, happened to him?" snapped the Judge, and then added soberly, "I don't know, Millie. I wish I did."

"An Irish boy can get just so far and no farther."

"How far, Millie?"

"Don't be flippant, Hugh. There's something strange about Neil lately. He didn't speak three times at the table last time he came to supper here. He looks at me as if he didn't know who I was when I speak to him on the street sometimes. There's no life in him. He's like Charlie and all the rest of them—giving out just when things are going his way; that's an Irish boy every time."

"When things are going his way? When his best friend has just shot himself?"

"I didn't refer to that, Hugh," said Mrs. Saxon with dignity.

"No?"

"I referred to Neil's family affairs, and the fact that Colonel Everard has taken him up."

"Maggie home and behaving herself and no questions asked, Charlie shipped to Wells, and Neil going shooting twice with the Colonel?"

"Three times, Hugh."

"And that's what you call things going his way."

"Hugh, why should those two spend any time together at all? They hate each other, or I always thought so—that is, if a man like the Colonel could hate a boy like Neil. What does he want of Neil now? What does Neil want of him?"

"They don't tell me, Millie."

"But it's queer. It frightens me, Hugh. It's as queer as——"

"What?"

"Everything," Mrs. Saxon said, goaded into an exaggeration foreign to her placid type, "everything, lately. You refusing to preside to-night. Lillian Burr shutting herself up in this uncanny way. It is uncanny, even if she is in trouble. Minna Randall taking to church work, and sewing for hours at a time, and taking long drives with her husband. They haven't been inside the Colonel's doors for weeks. Their second girl told

our Mary that they have refused five invitations there in the last month. It's my idea that he gave that last stag dinner because he couldn't get Minna or Edith there, or any woman. Why should his own circle turn against him, just when he's doing real good to the town? And it's not only his own circle that's against him. I was matching curtains at Ward's when Sebastian came in to-day, and Luther Ward was barely civil to him—the Colonel's own secretary. What's wrong with the town, Hugh? Can't it be grateful to the Colonel, now when he really deserves it?"

"Don't worry about what Everard deserves. He's not likely to get it, Millie."

Again the Judge was closing the subject, and this time his wife had no more to say. She gave his threadbare, scrupulously pressed coat a final pat and jerk of adjustment, and stood off and looked at him.

"You'll do," she said, "now go along. The music's stopping. It won't look well if you're late."

She turned off the flickering gas jet above the marble-topped bureau abruptly, but not before the Judge had caught the gleam of tears in her eyes.

"Why girl," he said, and came close to her and

slipped an arm round her plump, comfortable waist. "You're really troubled."

"Yes."

"And vexed with me for not helping you."

"Yes."

He had drawn her toward a front window of the big, square room. The Judge and his wife stood by it quietly, looking down through a triangle of white, starched curtains at the glimmering, sparsely lit length of street below, and straightening out their difficulties in darkness and silence, as all true lovers should, even lovers at fifty, as these two were fortunate enough to be.

"Millie, I don't want to tease you," the Judge said. "I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"I've been so worried," she wept comfortably against his shoulder. "I'm so afraid."

"Why?"

"I feel as if something—anything might happen. I—oh, you'll only laugh. I can't just tell you, Hugh."

"I'll tell you," said the Judge.

He hesitated and then went on slowly, speaking more to himself than to her.

"Women hate change. That makes them dread it, even when it's not coming. You're dreading it, but it's not coming now, dear. There's feeling against Everard. You're right, but you exagger-

ate it. It's instinctive and unformulated. It hasn't gone far and won't go any farther. He won't let it. The rally and the library and this new democracy stuff, stag dinners to Ward's crowd and all, are part of a campaign to stop it. The campaign will succeed. Everard's own crowd won't quarrel with him. They can't afford to. Everard has pulled through worse times than this. I've helped him myself, and I shall help him again.

"There'll be no change, Millie. Things will go on just the way they are. I've lived the best years of my life believing that it was best they should, and if I'm wrong, I'm too old to change my mind. I've said somebody had to own the town, and it might as well be Everard. I've said the Burrs and Kents and Randalls, and old Joe Grant's young wife with their parties and drinks and silly little love affairs, were playing too hard, but doing no real harm, planting their cheap, fake smart set here in Green River where it don't belong. Now poor Theodore Burr's dead. That don't look like play. Harry Randall's so deep in debt to the bank for what Everard's let him borrow that he has to stay on there at three thousand a year, though he's been offered twice that in Wells. Everard won't let him go. And the best I can say about myself in the years I've worked for Everard is that I've kept my hands clean, if

I have had to keep my eyes shut, but I can say that to you, Millie."

"It does look like old times down there," he went on softly, after a minute. "The street and the lights are the same. And it sounds like old times. It was from a rally in the hall that I first went home with you, Millie. Remember? I was just a boy then, but I wish I was half the man I was then, to-night." He heard a murmur of protest, and laughed. "But I do, Millie. I—wouldn't be helping Everard."

"Oh, Hugh!"

"Don't worry. Everard will pull through all right. Look at the Randalls over there, starting for the hall. Leave your windows open, Millie, and you'll soon hear them all cheering for Everard. The moon won't rise till late, but it will be full to-night. Listen, the band's going into the hall now."

The Judge rested his cheek for a moment against his wife's soft, smooth hair, the decorous, satisfying caress of a decorous generation, then he raised his head with a long, tired sigh.

"I wish I was young," he said. "I wish I was young to-night."

"I wish I was young," the Judge had said, with a thrill and hunger that was the soul of youth

itself in his voice. At the moment when he said it, a boy who had the privilege that the Judge coveted, and was not enjoying it just then, was leaning against the court-house railing, and watching Green River crowd into Odd Fellows' Hall.

Another boy had pushed his way across the square to his side, and was not heartily welcomed there, but was calmly unconscious of it.

"Some night, Donovan," he remarked.

"Some night, Willard," Neil agreed gravely.

"Going in? Good for three hours of hot air?"

"I'm not going. No."

"Good boy. Say—" Mr. Willard Nash lowered his voice as he made this daring suggestion—"we'll go around to Halloran's, and get into a little game."

His invitation was not accepted.

"Jerry Dugan's not dead yet," observed Willard presently.

Strains of a deservedly popular waltz tune, heard from inside the hall, gave faint but unmistakable proof of this. Willard kept time with his feet as he listened, paying the tune the tribute of silence, a rare one from him. Standing so, the two were sharply contrasted figures, though the flickering lamps in the square threw only faint light here, and showed them darkly outlined against the railing, as they leaned there side by

side. Pose, carriage, every movement and turn of the head were different, as different as a bulky and overgrown child is from a boy turning into a man.

"Some night," Willard repeated, unanswered, but unchilled by it, "and some crowd."

The hall had been filling fast. Though the waltz still swung its faint challenge into the night, so much of Green River had responded to it already that now it was arriving only by twos and threes. But the groups still followed each other fast under the big globe of light at the entrance door, gayly shaded with red for the occasion, and up the bare, clattering stairs to the floor above, and the hall.

Willard was right, more right than he knew. There was a crowd up there, a crowd as Willard did not understand the word; a crowd with a tone and temper of its own and a personality of its own. It was subject to laws of its own and could think and feel for itself, and its thoughts and feelings were made up of the brain stuff of every person in it, but different from them all. It was a newly created thing, a new factor in the world, and like all crowds it was born for one evening, to live for that evening only, and do its work and die.

Upstairs behind closed doors, such a crowd was forming; getting ready to think its own thoughts

and act and feel, and so many houses, little and big, had emptied themselves to contribute to it, so many family discussions like the Saxons' had gone on as a prelude to it, that you might fairly say the crowd up there was Green River.

Willard, watching the late arrivals and commenting upon them to Neil, still an uncommunicative audience, was vaguely stirred.

"This gets me," he conceded. "There's something about old Dugan's music that always gets me. For two cents, I'd go in. I sat through a patent medicine show there last week, because I didn't have the sense to stay away. It always gets me when there is anything doing in the hall. And—" he paused, heavily testing his powers of self-analysis, "it gets me," he brought out at length, "more to-night than it ever did before. It—gets me."

"Look, there's Joe Grant," Willard went on. "This is his night, all right. Look at the bulge to that manuscript case, and the shine to his hair. He mixes varnish with his hair dye, all right. I said, look at him."

"I'm looking."

"Well, you don't do much else. What's eating you to-night? Say, will you go in if I will?"

An inarticulate murmur answered him.

"What's that?"

"No."

"All right. Well, what do you know about that? Look there."

"I'm looking."

The latest comers were crowding hurriedly into the entrance hall by this time, and with them, a slender, heavily veiled figure had slipped quickly through the door and out of sight.

"Was that Lil?" Willard said. "Lil Burr?"

"Yes."

"She wouldn't come here; I don't believe it."

"I know it."

"How?"

"She told me."

"What was she doing, talking to you? Why, she won't talk to anybody. She——"

"You'll be late at Hallorans'."

"Aren't you coming?"

"No."

"But you said you would. I don't want to go if you don't. I don't half like to leave you here, you act so queer to-night. What makes you act so? What's eating——"

"Nothing."

Willard detached himself from the railings and regarded his friend, suddenly breathless with surprise, and deeply grieved. Nothing. The word, harmless in itself, had been spoken so that it hit

him like an actual blow, straight from the shoulder. Neil, shifting so that the light showed his face, was returning his look with the sudden, unreasoning anger that we feel toward little sounds that beat their slow way into our consciousness at night, to irritate us unendurably at last.

"Go," he urged, "go along to Halloran's. Go anywhere."

"Well, what do you know about that?" began Willard, offended, and then forgave him. There was a look in Neil's pale face that commanded forgiveness. It was pale and strained with a trouble that had nothing to do with Willard, and Willard was respectful and inarticulate before it.

"That's all right," Willard muttered, "that will be all right. I'll go."

Neil took no notice of this promise. Up in the hall the waltz had swelled to a high, light-hearted climax, heady and strained, like the sudden excitements that sweep a crowd. It came clear through the open windows, making one last appeal to the boy below to come up and be part of what was there. And just then a small closed car swept down through the empty square and stopped. Two men stepped out, and paused in the doorway under the red-shaded light.

One was the Colonel's secretary, waiting on the

step beyond range of the light, a tall, shadowy figure, and the other, who stood with the light on his face, was Colonel Everard.

He was still pale from his week of illness, but his keen eyes and clear-cut profile were more effective for that. He stood listening to the sounds from upstairs, and he smiled as he listened. He turned at last and looked out across the square as if he could feel Neil's eyes upon him and were returning their look, and then turned away and disappeared up the stairs.

"Neil," Willard was announcing uneasily, "I think a lot of you. I'd do a lot for you. If you're in wrong, any way, if——"

Willard broke off, rebuffed. Neil did not even look at him. He stood staring at the lighted doorway where the Colonel had stood and smiled, as if he could still see him there. He was a creature beyond Willard's world, as he looked, but unaccountably fascinating to Willard. Willard regarded him in awed silence.

Now Dugan's music had stopped. Some one above shut a window with a clatter that echoed disproportionately loud. Then there was silence up there, tense silence, and the call of the silence was harder to resist than the music. The boy by the court-house railing could not resist it. He pushed away Willard's detaining hand, and with-

out a word to him or another glance at him, was across the square and through the red-lighted door, and running up the stairs.

"What do you know about that?" Willard demanded, in vain. "What do you know——"

Willard, certainly, knew nothing, and gave up the attempt to understand, with a sigh.

A little later the vantage point of the court-house fence was unoccupied. Of the two boys who had occupied it, one was making a belated and rather disconsolate way toward Halloran's—the one who would be boasting to-morrow that he had spent the last fifteen minutes with Neil Donovan. The other boy stood listening outside the closed doors of the hall.

It was half an hour later and it had been an important half-hour in Odd Fellows' Hall, that uneventful but vital time when the newly made creature that is the crowd is passive, gathering its forces slowly, getting ready to fling the weight of them into one side of a balance irrevocably, if it has decisions to make; the most important half-hour of the evening if you were interested in the psychology of crowds. The Honourable Joe Grant was not. He would have said that the first speech dragged and the half-hour had been dull. Dull or significant, that half-hour was over, and Green

River was waking up. In the listening hush of the hall the big moments of the evening, whatever they were to be, were creeping nearer and nearer. Now they were almost here.

The Honourable Joe had just introduced Luther Ward and heavily resumed his seat. He sat portly and erect and entirely happy behind the thin-legged, inadequate looking table that held a water pitcher, his important looking papers, and his watch. The ornately chased gold watch that had measured so many epoch-making hours for Green River was in public life again, like the Honourable Joe. He fingered it affectionately, wiped his forehead delicately from time to time with a purple silk handkerchief, followed Mr. Ward's remarks with unwavering brown eyes, and smiled his benevolent, public-spirited smile. This was his night indeed.

Behind the Honourable Joe, on the stage in a semi-circular row of chairs were the speakers of the evening, and before him was Green River.

The badly proportioned little hall was not at its best to-night. It was too brightly lit and the footlights threw an uncompromising glare upon the tiny stage. Red, white, and blue cheesecloth in crude, sharp colouring draped windows and stage, making gay little splashes of colour that emphasized the dinginess of the room. Only the

Grand Army flag, borrowed and draped elaborately above the stage, showed faded and thin against the brightness of the cheesecloth, but kept its dignity and kept up its claim to homage still. And the ugliness of the room was a thing to be discounted and forgotten, like some beautiful, full-blooded woman's tawdry, and ill-chosen clothes, because this room held Green River.

Green River, filling the little room to overflowing, standing in the rear of the room, crowding every available inch of space on benches, window sills, and an emergency supply of camp chairs, impressive as that much sheer bulk of humanity, crowded between four walls, becomes impressive, and impressive in its own right, too; Green River represented as it was, with all the warring, unreconciled elements that made the town.

For they were all here, Paddy Lane, and the Everard circle, and the intermediate stages of society, the Gaynors and other prosperous farmers and unprosperous farmers and their wives, from the outskirts of the town, and citizens a cut above them both, like the Wards, were all represented here. Mrs. Kent, hatless and evening coated, was elbowed by a lady from Paddy Lane, hatless because she had no presentable hat, and wearing a ragged shawl. These two were side by side, and they had the same look on their faces. There

was something of it now on every face in the room. It was a look of listening and waiting.

It was on every face, and it grew more intense every minute that Luther Ward's speech droned on, though it was only a dry, illogical rehash of political issues that could not have called that look into any face. It was as if the audience listened eagerly through it because every word of it was bringing them nearer to something that was to follow. What was it? What did Green River want? What was it waiting for? Green River itself did not know, but it was very near.

Perhaps it was coming now. This might well be the climax of the evening. No more important event was scheduled. Luther Ward, looking discontented with his performance, but relieved to complete it, had sunk into his chair to a scattered echoing of applause, and the next speaker was Colonel Everard.

The Honourable Joe was rising to introduce him. The little introductory speech was a masterpiece, for, though the Colonel had edited every word of it, it was still in the Honourable Joe's best style, flowery and sprinkled with quotations.

"I will not say more," it concluded magnificently, "of one whose life and work among you can best speak for itself, and who will speak for himself now, in his own person. I present to

you the Republican candidate for mayor, Colonel Everard."

And now the Honourable Joe had bowed and smiled himself into his seat, and the great man was on his feet, and coming forward to the centre of the stage. The first real applause of the evening greeted him, not very hearty or sustained, but prompt at least. He looked like a very great man indeed, as he stood acknowledging it, his most effective self, a strong man, though so lightly built, erect and pliant of carriage, a man with infinite reserves of power and dignity. He was smiling, and his smile was the same that the boy by the court-house fence had seen, a tantalizing smile of assurance and charm and power, as if he were master of himself and the town.

This was his moment, planned for and led up to for weeks, but Colonel Everard was slow to take advantage of it. He stood still, with his eyes toward the rear of the hall. As he stood so, heads here and there turned and looked where he was looking. Presently all Green River saw what the Colonel saw. A boy was pushing his way toward the front of the hall—a boy who had slipped quietly inside the doors unnoticed fifteen minutes before, and came forward now just as quietly, but held their eyes as he came. Now he had reached the stage, and he broke through the barrier of golden-

rod that fenced the short flight of steps, crushing the flowers under his feet, and now he was on the stage confronting Colonel Everard. It was Neil Donovan.

"Sit down," he said to the great man. "They're not going to listen to you. They're going to listen to me."

After that he did not wait to see if the great man took his amazing advice. He came forward alone, and spoke to Green River. He was not an imposing figure as he stood there, only a lean, eager boy, with dark, flashing eyes, and a face that was very pale in the glare of the footlights. He hardly raised his tense, low-pitched voice as he spoke, but Green River heard.

"You're going to listen to me."

And it was true. Green River was going to listen. In the middle of the hall, where the chief delegation from Paddy Lane was massed, a ripple of excitement promised the boy support. It was seconded by a muttering and shuffling of feet on the rear benches, devoted to the youth of the town. From here and there in the hall there were murmurs of protest, too, dying out one by one, and ceasing automatically, like the whispered consultation that went on behind him on the stage.

But the boy did not wait for support or regard interruptions. He did not need to. The audience

was his in spite of them, and he knew it and they knew it. Whatever he had to say, important or not, it was what they had been waiting for; that was what the evening had been leading to, and it was here at last. Pale and intent, the boy looked across the footlights at Green River. The audience was his, but he had no pride in the triumph. He began haltingly to speak.

"It will do no good to you or me, but you're going to listen. I've got a word to say about Everard.

"He's sucked your town dry for years and you know it. He's had the pick of your men and used their brains and their youth, and he's had the pick of your women. If there are any of you here that he's got no hold on, it's because you're worth nothing to h m. He's got the town. Now he's driven one of your boys to his death.

"'I can't beat him.' That's what Theodore Burr said to me the night he died. 'They won't blame him for this. I want to die because I don't want to live in the world with him, but I'll do no harm to him by dying, only to Lily and me. They won't blame him. You can't beat Everard.'

"Well, you don't blame Everard. He's got you where you don't blame him, whatever he does. You shut your eyes to it. He's got you. You know all this and you shut your eyes. Now I'll

tell you some things you don't know. Everard's been trying for weeks to bribe me to keep my mouth shut, like he bribed Charlie for years. He might have saved his breath and his money. I can't hurt him, whether I keep my mouth shut or not. You won't blame him. You'll let him get away with this, too. But you're going to know."

The boy came closer still to the footlights and leaned across them, pausing and deliberately choosing his words. The pause, and the look in his dark, intent eyes as he stood there challenged Green River and dared it to interrupt him. But it was too late to interrupt, too late to stop him now. And behind him in the place of honour in the centre of the row of chairs on the stage, one man at least was powerless to stop him: Colonel Everard, who listened with a set smile on his lips, and a set stare in his eyes.

"He's the man that broke Maggie Brady's life to pieces," Neil's low voice went on. "Everard's the man. He got her away from town. He filled her head with him and set her wild and she had to go. When he was tired of her, he left her in a place he thought she'd be too proud to come back from. She was proud, but he's broken her pride, and she crawled back to us. The prettiest girl in the town, she was, and you all knew that, and my sister and more to me——" he broke off

abruptly, and laughed a dry little laugh that echoed strangely in the silent room. His voice sounded dry and hard as he went on.

"He broke Maggie's life, but what's that to you, that give him a chance at your women, knowing well what he is, and leave them to take care of themselves with him, your own women that are yours to take care of, daughters and wives? It's nothing to you, but you're going to know it, and you're going to know this. I had it straight from Theodore Burr the night he died.

"Everard's going to sell you out at the next election, the whole of you—his own crowd, too. He's been planning it for months. He's worked prohibition for all it's worth to him; worked for it till the state went dry, and then he's made money for you that are in it with him, and more for himself, protecting places like Halloran's that sell liquor on the quiet, and the smuggling of liquor into the state. Well, he's made money enough that way, and it's getting risky, and now he sees a way to make more and let nobody in on it. He's going to sell out to the liquor interests and work against prohibition, and the big card he'll use will be exposing Halloran's and the secret traffic in liquor, and all the crowd that's been buying protection from him. There's a big campaign started already, and big money being spent. There'll be big

money in it for him. There'll be arrests made here and a public scandal. He's going to sell the town.

"Maybe that interests you some. Maybe it gets you. It won't for long. He'll crawl out of it and lie out of it and talk you and buy you back to him. Well, I know one thing more, and he can't lie or crawl out of it. My father could have put him behind bars any time in twenty years. He's a common thief.

"It was when he was seventeen, and studying law first, back in a town up state that's not on the map or likely to get there, and he was called by a name there that wasn't Everard. He was seventeen, but he was the same then as now; he had the same will to get on and the power to, no matter who he trampled on to get there, and the same charm that got men and women both, though they didn't trust him—got them even when he was trampling on them and they knew it. It got him into trouble there with two girls at once. One was the girl that gave him his start, the chance to go into her uncle's office. He was the biggest man in the town. Older than Everard, this girl was, and teaching in the school he went to, when she fell in love with him and brought him home to her town and gave him his chance. He was tired of her, and she was where it was bound to come out soon how things were with them, and so was

the other girl, a girl that he wasn't tired of, the daughter of the woman where he boarded. He tried to get her to go away with him. She wouldn't go and she wouldn't forgive him, but the town was getting too hot for him, and he had to go

"He had to go quick and make a clean getaway and he wanted a real start this time. He had to have money. That was a dead little town. There was only one place he could get money enough, in the little hotel there. It was the only bank they had. The keeper of it used to cash checks and make loans. Everard was lucky, the same then as now. There was almost five thousand dollars in the safe in the hotel office the night he broke into it, and that was enough for him. He had a fight with the hotel clerk, but he got away with the money, and he got away from the town.

"The clerk was his best friend in town—never trusted him, but fell for him the same as the girls and lent him money and listened to his troubles—and fell for him again when he ran across him again, years later, here in Green River. Everard told him he'd sent the money back, and he kept the secret. He never took hush money for it like Charlie. He said Everard ought to have his chance, and was straight now. But he fell for Everard again, that's what happened. Everard had him, the same as the rest of you.

"The clerk was my father."

The boy's voice broke off. There was dead silence in the hall. Green River had been listening almost in silence, and did not break it now. Presently the boy sighed, shrugged his thin shoulders as if they were throwing off an actual weight, and spoke again, this time in a lifeless voice, with all the colour and drama wiped out of it, a voice that was very tired.

"That's all," he said. "That's back of him, with his fine airs and his far-reaching schemes and his big name in the state. You've stood for a crook. Will you stand for a common criminal, a common thief? Now you know and it's up to you. That's all."

An hour later a boy was hurrying through the dark along the road to the Falls.

He was almost home. Green River lay far behind with its scattered, sparsely strewn lights. The flat fields around him and the unshaded road before him, so bleak by day, were beautiful tonight, far reaching and mysterious. Above them, flat looking and unreal, remote in a coldly clouded sky, hung the yellow September moon.

"I've done for myself," the boy was saying half out loud, as if the faraway moon could hear. "I've lost everything now. I've done for myself."

The boy was sure of this, but could have told little more about the events of the evening. He remembered listening outside the hall doors until he was drawn inside in spite of himself, and listening there until something snapped in his brain, and suddenly the long days of repression, of vainly wondering what to do with his hard-won knowledge, were over, and he was pouring it all out in one jumbled burst of speech. He had no plan and no hope of doing harm to his enemy by speaking. He had to speak.

After he had spoken he remembered getting down from the stage and out of the hall somehow. He remembered the crushed goldenrod, slippery under his feet. Against a background of blurred, unrecognizable faces, he remembered a tall, black-garbed figure that rose to its feet swaying and then steadying itself. It was Lilian Burr. Less clearly he remembered a wave of sound from the hall that followed him as he hurried away across the square. It was not like applause. He did not know or care what it meant. After that, he remembered only the cool dark of the September night as he walked through it aimlessly at first, and then turned toward home.

"I've lost everything," he had said, and it must be true. How could he face the Judge again? How could he go on living in Green River? This

was what all his long-cherished dreams had come to; a scene that Charlie might have made, and disgrace in the eyes of the town. He had lost everything.

Yet strangely, as he said it, he knew that it was not true. Whatever he had lost, he had better things left. He had those free and splendid minutes of speaking out his heart. They could not be taken from him. The freedom and relief of them was with him still. And he had the road firm under his feet, and the clean air blowing the fever out of his brain, and the strength of his own young body, clean strength, good to feel as he walked through the night. And along the dark road before him, familiar as it was, and worn so many times by discouraged feet, the white track of moonlight beckoned him, clean and new. It was a way that might lead anywhere—to fairyland, to success, to the end of the world.

Now the boy made the turn in the road that brought him within sight of home. Faint lights twinkling from it, intimate and warm, invited him as never before. Was his mother waiting up for him? Home itself, lighted and intimate and safe, was enough to find waiting. His heart gave a strange little leap that hurt, but was keen pleasure, too. Almost running, he covered the last bit of road, crossed the grassy front yard and then

climbed the creaking front steps, and stood for a minute that was unendurably long, fumbling with the door.

The door was unlocked and gave suddenly, opening wide, and he stood on the threshold of the kitchen. The lights he had seen were in the sitting-room beyond. In this room there was only moonlight. It came through the window that looked out on the marshy field, the fairies' field. Surely there must be fairies there to-night, out in the empty green spaces, flooded with moonlight. But the fairies were not all in the field, there was one in the room. Neil could see it.

The old rocking chair stood in the moonlit window. It was holding two, his mother, and some one else—the fairy, golden haired and white robed and slender, and close in his mother's arms. As he stood and wondered and looked, a board creaked under his feet. It was the faintest of sounds, but a fairy's ears are keen, and the fairy heard, and stirred, and turned in his mother's arms.

Now Neil could see her face. It was flushed and human and warm, and in her eyes, opening grave and deep, was a look that was the shyest but surest of welcomes. The welcome was all for Neil, and the fairy was Judith.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A BOY and a girl sat on the doorsteps of the Randall house.

It was almost a year since the night of the rally. It was an evening in late May—late, but it was May, and the fairies' month still. There was a pleasant, shivery chill in the air. A far sprinkling of stars made the dark of the still, windless night look darker and warmer and safer to whisper in. The big horse-chestnut tree at the corner of the syringa hedge was only a darker blot against the surrounding dark, and the slope of faintly lit street on the other side of the hedge looked far away, with the dark sweep of lawn between. It was a night for the fairies, or for the girl and boy, and that was quite as it should be, for it was their first together for months.

Judith and Neil sat discreetly erect on the steps, undoing what those months apart had done with little bursts of shy speech, and long, shy silences that helped them more. In the longest and shyest silence their hands had groped for each other once, met as if they had never touched before, and clung together for a minute as if they never meant to

let go, but Judith kept firmly to impersonal subjects still.

"You did it all," she said. "Things do happen so fast when they happen. Just think, this time last year he was like a king!"

"Everard?"

"Yes. Do you remember how I used to be cross when you called him that, and wouldn't say Colonel? How childish that was!" Judith patronized her dead self, as a young lady may, with her twentieth birthday almost upon her.

"You weren't childish."

"What was I?"

"Just what you are now."

"What's that?"

"Wonderful." Neil chose his one adequate word, from the tiny vocabulary of youth, small because few words are worthy to voice the infinite dreams of it. "Wonderful."

"No, I'm not wonderful. You are. That dreadful old man, and every one knew he was dreadful and wouldn't do anything about it till you——"

"Bawled him out? That's all I did, you know, really. It was a kid's trick. He lost out because it was coming to him anyway. Poor Theodore saw to that. He turned the town against Everard when he killed himself. It wasn't turning fast,

but it was turning. I did give it a shove and make it turn faster, but I didn't even have sense enough to know I had until the day after the rally, when the Judge sent for me and told me. I didn't dare go near him until he sent for me, and I thought he had sent for me to fire me."

"But you broke up the rally. They were dead still in the hall until you left, and then they went crazy, calling for you, and all talking at once, talking against you, some of them, till it really wasn't a rally any more, but just like a mob. Oh, I know. The Judge tells me, every time I go to ride with him, and when he came on to the school last winter and saw me there, he told me all over again. Father has never half told me. He hates to talk about the rally or the Colonel either, but I don't care, he and mother are both so sweet to me lately—just sweet.

"So it was just like a mob, and then poor Mrs. Burr got up and tried to speak, and they got quiet and listened, and she said "Every word the boy says is true and more—more——" just like that, and then she got faint and had to stop, and then the Judge took hold. That's what he says he did, took hold, and he says it was time, because they might have tarred and feathered the Colonel if he hadn't. I don't suppose they would, but I wish I could have seen the Judge take hold. I love him."

"Don't you love anybody else?"

Judith ignored this frivolous interruption, as it deserved.

"And so your work was done, though you didn't know it and ran away. And the Judge says you are a born orator, Neil. That you've got the real gift, the thing that makes an audience yours. I don't know just what he means, but I know you've got it, too. You're going to be a great man, Neil."

"I didn't do anything."

"You're the only man in town who thinks that, then, or has since that night. He—Everard—was done for the minute you stepped on the stage, the Judge says. Only they managed it decently, the Judge and the few that kept their heads. They announced that Colonel Everard was indisposed and couldn't speak, and the Judge took him home. He really was ill next day. There's something wrong with his horrid heart. And that gave him a good excuse not to run for mayor, he gave that up himself. And in a few days the Judge and Luther Ward went to him and told him what else he had to do, and he did it. He had to resign from everything, everything he was in charge of or was trustee of, or had anything to do with, and get out of town. If he'd do that, they wouldn't make any scandal or bother him afterward, but let

him start new. And they gave him six months to do all that decently and save his face. Why did he have to do it decently? Why couldn't they tar and feather him? I wish they had. I wish——"

"Wish something else, Judith. Something about us."

"What do you mean by us?"

"You and me."

"Isn't it splendid the Judge is going to be president of the bank?" said Judith hastily.

"Splendid," said a future president of the Green River Bank, who was occupying the step beside her.

"And isn't it nice that poor Mrs. Burr is going to marry Mr. Sebastian, even if she does have to move away from Green River? I like people to be happy, don't you?"

"No. No, I don't. Not other people. I don't care whether they are happy or not, and I don't want to talk about them, only about you and me."

"If you don't like the way I talk, I'll keep still," Judith said, in a severe but small voice, but a small hand groping for his softened the threat, and a soft, sudden laugh as his arm slipped round her atoned for it entirely. Then there was silence on the steps, a long, whispering, wonderful silence. Long before Judith spoke again all the work of

the lonely months was undone. And the low whispers that the two exhanged conveyed no further information about Colonel Everard.

But there was no more to tell. The master of Green River was master no longer and the end of all the intricate planning and scheming that had made and kept him master was a story that Judith could tell in a few careless sentences and forget. If she had seen and guessed some things that she could not forget, in the strange little circle that had found a place for her, she would never see them again. That order was gone from the town forever, with the man who had created it, and beside her on the steps was the boy who could make her forget it, and see beyond the long, hard years between. And, as she almost could guess, in these magic minutes when she could dream and dream true, that boy was the future master of Green River.

Judith sighed, and stirred in his arms.

"Are you happier now?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"But you're going to be great. You are, really."

"I am if you want me to. Judith, how long does your father think you and I ought to wait?"

"I don't know. You can ask him. He likes you better than me. He always wanted me to be a

boy. . . . Neil, I want to tell you something. Keep your arm like that, but don't look at me."

"Why?"

"It's about what you don't like me to talk about."

"Everard?"

"Yes, and it's about something dreadful, that day in his library when I was alone with him, and you came. He—frightened me."

"Never mind, dear, now."

"He frightened me but that was—all. I wasn't hurt or anything. I just didn't know he—anybody—could look the way he was looking, or act the way he was acting, and then I felt sick all over. I was afraid. But he was just trying to kiss me, of course, and I wasn't going to let him, the horrid old man. So I think now it was silly to be frightened. Was it?"

"No, it wasn't silly, dear."

"I'm glad. And Neil—I want to tell you something else. It's about—that night—in the buggy, on the old road to Wells, you know, when you were going to elope with me and changed your mind."

"When I frightened you so. Oh, Judith."

"You didn't—frighten me," said a very small voice indeed. "You——"

"What, dear?"

"Made me want you—want to go away with

you. I never felt like that before, all waked up and different and—happy. Oh, you didn't frighten me. I wasn't angry because you tried to take me away. It was because you brought me back."

"Don't you know why I brought you back?"

"No."

"Why, because I loved you. I didn't love you till then, not really; not till that minute in the carriage. I know just what minute. When you let me kiss you, and didn't mind any more. Then I knew about—love. I never knew before, but I'll never forget again. It isn't just wanting people, it's taking care of them, and not hurting them. Waiting till you can have things—right. So I wanted to have you right and be fit for you, and after that night I went to work and I wouldn't be stopped, not by anything in this town or the world. Oh, Judith, why don't you speak to me? It isn't much use to talk. You don't understand."

"I—do."

"You're crying!"

She was crying, and she did understand. Before this unexpected, beautiful proof of it, the boy was reverent and half ashamed, as if a woman's tears were a sacred miracle invented for him. He held her hand timidly and pressed it. Presently she drew it away, and suddenly she was not crying,

but laughing, a low, full-throated laugh as wonderful to him as her tears.

"I told you, you did it all," she said softly. "Well, you didn't. Neil, there's what did it all. Because, if you only go on believing in things and being sweet and true and not afraid, and—wishing, then everything will come right. It's got to, just because you want it to. So there's what did it all and made us so happy, you and me. I love it. Love it, Neil."

Neil looked where Judith was looking. Above the horse-chestnut tree, so filmy and faint that the stars looked brighter than ever, so pale that it was not akin to the stars, but to the dark beyond, where adventures were, so friendly and sweet that it could make the wish in your heart come true, hung a new-risen silvery crescent of light.

"But it's only the moon," Neil said.

"It's—the wishing moon," said Judith.

THE END

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